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HISTORY OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

(*WYCLIF, CHAUCER, EARLIEST DRAMA, RENAISSANCE*)



College of the Pacific  
Stockton, Calif.

# HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

(*WYCLIF, CHAUCER, EARLIEST DRAMA,  
RENAISSANCE*)

BY  
BERNHARD TEN BRINK

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY  
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"SHAKSPERE: THE MAN AND HIS MIND"

(TRANSLATION REVISED BY THE AUTHOR)

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

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THE first volume of this work, which appeared in its English dress just ten years ago with a valuable appendix by the author, reviewed the history of English Literature from the earliest times of the ancient hymnic poetry and the old Teutonic Deities up to the close of *Piers Plowman's Vision*, and forms the standard and almost the only reliable work on our earliest English Literature.

In the present volume the author puts forth all his strength and compresses the results of his life-long study of Chaucer. By the side of Chaucer are placed Wyclif, the early religious drama, and the Renaissance. The present volume may be considered the crowning work of the author's life.

The proposed second volume apparently outgrew its contemplated limits, and the author published the portion here given, as Volume II. Part i., without waiting to complete the portion he had designed as Volume II. Volume II. Part ii. is to continue the history up to the accession of Queen Elizabeth, and should contain the Appendix to which frequent reference is made in these pages. It had not gone through the press when the author's sudden and lamented death occurred in January, 1892.

Among the last acts of his life were his reading of my MS., and his instructions to his colleague about some alterations or kindly suggestions for the improvement of my text. But almost all the changes my version experienced were practically made by his own hand. In this paternal oversight I have cause for self-congratulation, for not every translator is so fortunate. I also received Professor Ten Brink's authority to make enlargements, extra foot-notes, a new arrangement of the paragraphs, or whatever else I might consider helpful in bringing the work more closely home to his English and American readers, on whose appreciation he set great value. But I have naturally refrained from making much use of such flattering confidence; any changes or additions are duly noted where they occur.

Besides the author's critical revision of my text, many of the proof sheets have been read by experienced students of English Literature, which has frequently resulted in a greater clearness of diction.

But I must assume personally the entire responsibility for whatever failings or demerits the translation may be found to possess.

WM. CLARKE ROBINSON.

*University Extension Office,  
Philadelphia, November 29, 1892.*

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*BOOK IV.*

*(Continued.)*

PRELUDE TO THE REFORMATION AND  
THE RENAISSANCE.





## HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

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### IV. <sup>1</sup>

THE religious and moral satire of Langland, which occupied us in the previous chapter, was borne along by a strong current of national enthusiasm ; and the stream now took a turn which became threatening to the universal supremacy of the Pope. In those days in England, as almost everywhere else, the fight against the worldliness of the clergy went hand in hand with the endeavor to withdraw the secular power, as well as the external organization of the national church, as much as possible from the papal influence.

Edward I. had raised the English kingship with a powerful hand from the degradation to which it had been brought by John Lackland, and with which the ill-regulated government of Henry III. had made it only too familiar. In his ecclesiastical policy, being a far-seeing and energetic ruler, Edward had carried on the traditions of his great-grandfather, Henry II. ; with greater discretion and better success than Henry II. he had set about his work without, however, being able to settle the most important and burning questions. His line of policy was interrupted by his death in 1307, but was resumed by his grandson. The year 1333, when Edward III. took the reins of government into his own hands, was all-important for the relations of England with Rome. Henceforth the Curia waited in vain for the payment of the yearly tribute the Pope had once imposed on John at the time of his greatest distress. Other signs, showing that a great change of policy was at

hand, were soon discernible. A growing discontent arose against the institution of the papal Provisions, which allotted numerous benefices in England to foreign ecclesiastics, and thus caused large sums of money to be sent to the papal treasury under the name of Annates, or first-fruits. When the urgent representations of Parliament and king were found of no effect, a stringent law was passed in 1351, against the so-called "Provisors" or papal agents, who carried on the traffic in benefices. Under these circumstances England could no longer tolerate the claim of the Curia to a right to decide in the last instance in points of litigation. A new statute, therefore, of the year 1353, threatened with severe punishment all those who should make any appeal from the king's courts to foreign jurisdictions.

There has seldom been a time in the whole course of history when so many different intellectual currents and so many various interests worked so plainly together for one and the same end, as at this period. The war carried on hitherto successfully by England for the crown of France, the "Babylonian Captivity" of the papacy at Avignon, the increased respect for the English king and the growing influence of the House of Commons, the strongly aroused national feeling and the newly awakened religious sentiment, the rise of the English language and the revival of the old alliterative verse, all these forces, so different in kind, gave to that period a most decided impress, which was in a certain sense decisive for the outcome of the contest between church and state.

In this state of things it was a rash step for Pope Urban V., in 1365, to make a formal demand on Edward III. for the tribute promised by King John, and to insist on its payment for the past thirty years, during which it had not been collected, and in case of refusal to threaten the king of England with an order to appear in person before the papal throne. Edward acted in the spirit of the times; he laid the papal order before his Parliament, which met in May, 1366. There could be no doubt as to its decision. The offended national pride boiled over in both houses of Parliament; even the prel-

ates, conscious of their delicate situation, were borne along in the torrent of seething indignation.

The Parliament declared unanimously that King John had no authority, without its consent, to subject the country to the papal jurisdiction; that, by concluding such a treaty, he had broken his coronation oath; and that the treaty was therefore null and void. For the protection of the crown and royal dignity, the Parliament placed the whole power and resources of the nation at the king's disposal.

The adherents of the Curia did not remain idle; but they found it necessary to prepare their schemes in secret. An anonymous pamphlet soon appeared, in which the most determined supporters of the papal authority must have found their views expressed with sufficient clearness. The absolute exemption of the clergy from the civil jurisdiction was here boldly asserted, as well as the absolute independence of church possessions from secular control. On the other hand, the authority of the king of England was made dependent on the conditions and tribute promised by John, and the investiture conferred by the Pope.

The author of the pamphlet styled himself a Monk and Doctor of Theology; and, in his confidence of victory, he challenged one of the foremost scholars in the opposite camp to come forth and refute his statements. This scholar was henceforward raised from a quiet and comparatively humble sphere of life to the arena of the great battles of the age, and on him the full light of history was ever afterwards to beat. This scholar was John Wyclif: it was he who brought the political and religious tendencies of the age into the closest and most fruitful connection with the growth of the national language and literature of England.

Wyclif was then somewhat over forty years of age, and was considered as an honor to the University of Oxford, to which he had belonged both as student and teacher for probably over a quarter of a century. Born in the northern extremity of Yorkshire, he possessed all the keenness of perception, all the firmness of character, and even all the obstinacy of purpose of his Yorkshire

countrymen. Unlike Richard Rolle, his most famous contemporary from the same county, Wyclif was not given to mystic reveries, but possessed a cool and strictly logical mind. Yet in religious matters he went right to the heart of the question, quite as much as Richard did, and was probably more or less influenced by Richard's works. With the same rigorous consistency as Richard, Wyclif regulated his whole life in conformity with what he found once and for all to be the right ; he was moved with the same zeal as the Hermit of Hampole in working out his ideas for the good of mankind.

Wyclif had led hitherto an academic life ; to some extent he had also fulfilled the duties of a pastor, and for his services had received many tokens of recognition. He had recently been made Warden of Canterbury Hall, which Archbishop Simon Islip had founded at Oxford ; but from this dignity he was dismissed as early as 1367 by Islip's monkish-minded successor, Langham. About this time he held the position of king's chaplain—at least the title "*peculiaris regis clericus*," by which he styles himself, hardly admits of any other interpretation. He had the reputation of being a very learned man, and had not only gone through all the prescribed studies of the university with credit, but had also mastered Roman law as well as the English national jurisprudence ; and he showed a keener interest in mathematics and natural science than most of the theologians of his time. He was formidable as a dialectician, and above all he had an enthusiastic reverence for the Holy Scriptures, of which he had also an intimate knowledge. There was still alive in the best minds at Oxford the spirit of that great bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste, whom Wyclif honored as a saint, and who had said of the Bible that "only with its aid could Peter's boat be guided to the haven of salvation." \*

Wyclif had also by this time made his appearance as an author. He had written a number of treatises in Latin on subjects discussed in his philosophical lectures at the university ; but their interest, it is true, is confined

\* *Epistolæ*, ed. Luard, p. 336 : *hac sola ad portum salutis dirigitur Petri navicula.*

to-day to a very few readers, viz.: those who desire to study the general views of the reformer in their first elements and principles, or who wish to follow out the threads which connect the doctrines of Wyclif with those of St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, or his conception of grace and predestination in comparison with that of St. Augustine and Thomas Bradwardine,\* the "Profound Doctor" of Oxford. But it is of interest to all to know that Wyclif, even when writing his *Logic*, kept in view his purpose of rendering the study of the Bible more easily accessible, and that he took his illustrations and propositions from the sacred text. He held, even in later years, that ignorance of logic was the source of that contempt with which the scriptural doctrines were regarded by many, and was the cause of erroneous popular views about the sacred Book. In these opinions he found himself upon the track of an earlier scholar, the celebrated Franciscan, William Occam, who had also belonged to Oxford.

The moment had now arrived when Wyclif began to follow Occam's steps in his public life also. As Occam had entered the lists as an author, for the good cause of the state in the battle between Pope Boniface VIII. and the French king, Wyclif now felt himself in a similar position to assert the independence of the English throne against the assumptions of the Vatican.

He went to work very cleverly, and at first with the greatest prudence. In his reply to the anonymous pamphlet, he carefully avoided everything that might seem opposed to the spiritual authority of the Pope; and expressly styles himself a humble and obedient son of the Roman church. In this important discussion he is careful not to give his own personal opinions, but contents himself with the modest rôle of representing the echo of the national voice—which was, indeed, the more effective method. He refers his antagonist to the decisions of Parliament, to the proceedings of the Upper House. Instead of the typical dialogue between a cleric and a knight, which Occam had employed in his well-known polemical treatise on church polity, Wyclif

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\* Died in 1349, as archbishop of Canterbury.



produces a piece of Parliamentary debate; he makes seven different lords state in succession their opinions of the pretensions of Urban V. The question is thus ventilated from all sides, and the antagonist is almost crushed under the weight of the arguments, which are very different in kind, but all directed to the same end.

It is not our object to pursue the different phases that the great conflict between church and state assumed in those decades. The din of battle rose higher and higher, the tone of the Parliament, rejoicing in its youth and conscious of its strength, became more and more decided; and in the same proportion we see Wyclif's rôle increasing in importance, and hear him speak his mind more and more unreservedly. A French canon, Arnold Garnier, had come to England in February, 1372, with a grand retinue, as papal nuncio and receiver of revenues of the apostolic treasury; in a pamphlet Wyclif inquires of him whether he is not guilty of perjury, since he has just sworn at Westminster that, in the exercise of his commission, he would leave the rights and interests of the crown and the nation entirely intact. Then, in forcible words, Wyclif exhorts the authorities to protect the common weal and the military efficiency of the nation against all encroachments; he shows how those imposts which were assessed on the parochial clergy, and which had to be paid in ready money, really fell most heavily on the parishioners, and describes such imposts as an alms extorted contrary to the gospel. Wyclif even ventures directly to exhort the Pope himself, and recalls the words of St. Bernard, who declared that the Pope's superiority ought to show itself in Christian virtues, in humility, charity, and long-suffering.

Nor was Wyclif's activity confined to the writing of pamphlets. In 1374 he was member of a deputation to Bruges, conducted by John Gilbert, bishop of Bangor, to discuss with the deputies of the Pope, and, if possible, to settle, the disputed questions of ecclesiastical law. At this very time John of Gaunt was also in Bruges, at the head of another English embassy, arranging terms of peace with the French plenipotentiaries. Wyclif's influence is evident also in the memorial, drawn up for the

"Good Parliament" in 1376, against the encroachments of the Pope. The next Parliament, the first under Richard II., meeting in October, 1377, appended to a new list of old grievances and means of redress this question: whether, in case of need, England could legally withhold the treasure of the country and prevent its being carried abroad, in spite of papal decrees and threats of ecclesiastical punishment? Now, again, it was the sturdy Oxford theologian who undertook—probably commissioned by high authority—to answer the question in an exhaustive reply, with a convincing display of dialectics and exegesis. His answer was, of course, in the affirmative.

Such restless and significant activity was soon destined to draw on Wyclif the attention of both friends and foes. He received many tokens of the royal favor. The most important of these was his appointment to the rectory of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, in 1374; for he held it till his death, and Lutterworth afforded a quiet haven for the closing years of his life. On the other hand Rome was sure in the long run to make an attempt to stop, or at least to thwart, the work of its ready and well-armed opponent, who strove with all his might, with his pen, and with living, fiery words from his chair and pulpit, to damage her cause and influence the government and Parliament against her. But the cautious way in which the spiritual authorities moved, and the small results of their action, showed how great a following and connection Wyclif already possessed.

When Wyclif was called to account by the church convocation at St. Paul's, on February 19, 1377, the Duke of Lancaster and Lord Henry Percy, Grand Marshal of England, came to his support, and stood by him with an armed retinue. Other friends also accompanied him, and four graduates in theology, from the four mendicant orders, had come, on the duke's request, to uphold Wyclif's cause if their help was needed. But no trial took place. John of Gaunt, with his defiant and domineering tone, and Courtenay, bishop of London, who was chairman of the convocation and very conscious of the dignity of his office, exchanged fierce words. The threats uttered by

either party, and the fear of a bloody conflict, brought the sitting to a speedy close. The five bills signed by Pope Gregory XI. on May 22, 1377, for the suppression of Wyclif, had little more effect. Three of them had been sent to the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London, one to the king, and one to the chancellor and University of Oxford. After the death of Edward III. and the coronation of Richard II., after the Parliament had been assembled and again prorogued, the two prelates thought the time had come for action ; and only now did they send out the bull to the chancellor of the university, accompanying it at the same time with a mandate, signed by themselves, with full apostolic power. The bull and the mandate do not appear to have made the expected impression at Oxford. Wyclif, nevertheless, appeared some months later before the Pope's commissioners in the archbishop's palace at Lambeth, and handed in a written defense to be forwarded to the Pope. This time it was the Princess of Wales, the widow of the Black Prince and mother of the reigning king, who interfered, and requested the commission not to proceed with the case. The Londoners also began to break out in Wyclif's favor. The commissioners, therefore, had to content themselves with the conclusion that those propositions of Wyclif which the Pope had condemned (nineteen in number) gave offense to the laity, and that the doctor, therefore, should not repeat them in his lectures or sermons.

The most important question, however, is, what was the result obtained by the religious and political agitation of this growing reformer ; to what goal tended the whole movement so energetically begun, and promising at first so much ? We must not expect trees to grow into the sky. The fact that Parliament continued to repeat its old grievances, and to complain about provisions and reservations, shows us sufficiently that really nothing was done to remedy the abuses in the church. Indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise. Everywhere in history, when great ideas are in progress of development, they always work together with other lower and more earthly powers, which may remove many difficulties from their way, but which in return are sure to load their wings



with their own deadening weight. This conjunction is perhaps nowhere so plainly seen as in the domain of church history, and especially in the history of this period.

If Edward III. was really determined to check the abuses which the Curia encouraged, there was only one course open to him—he should also have corrected those abuses which were a source of power and revenue to himself. Was it likely that he would, or even could, take this course? And besides, how unnatural must the alliance appear to us, between Wyclif's evangelical and patriotic intentions, and the Duke of Lancaster's reckless ambition. As was to be expected, such an alliance only brought "Greek presents" to the cause of church reform, as for instance the great plundering raid of 1373 on the prelates holding secular offices.

Such members of the English clergy as had been inclined to the cause of reform were now, for the most part, opposed to it. The high aristocracy and magnates of the land were drawn by politics and court intrigues into other paths. The people were full of discontent; discontented with the unfortunate turn of the war so happily begun against France; with the loss of Aquitaine; with the unprotected state of the sea; with the heavy taxes; with the consequences of bad harvests and epidemics; dissatisfied also with the sickness and early death of the Black Prince; with the rule of a woman and of courtesans over the weak and aged king; with the government of John of Gaunt and his creatures—a government that had fulfilled none of the hopes it had held out, and which, after a brief success of the opposition party, had established itself afresh, and showed no signs of ceasing with the death of Edward III.

Under these circumstances we ought to consider it a great gain that even so much was really attained. The state was declared independent of the Roman See; and neither Parliament nor people was disposed to submit again to Rome. It was also a point of some importance that a large portion of the people should have shown a just appreciation of the objects that Wyclif and those of similar mind had aimed at, and could so clearly dis-

tinguish his aims from those of his ambitious allies. The Good Parliament fully deserved its title ; it was under the leadership of the Black Prince just before his death, and he collected all his dying energies for one last great action. His Parliament attacked the encroachments of the Pope and his agents with the same energy it had shown in combating the Lancastrian party and in recalling the deserving chancellor, Bishop Wykeham of Winchester. And even in their excesses we must admire the sound sense of the London citizens, who, indeed, on March 20, 1377, insulted Wyclif's protector, John of Gaunt, by dishonoring his escutcheon, but who again in the following year broke into the bishop's palace at Lambeth themselves to protect the patriotic theologian.

The influence that Wyclif acquired among the people was destined to increase when he turned his attention from questions of church politics to questions of religion and faith. The ten years from 1370 to 1380 show an important change in Wyclif's inner life. From being merely a learned theologian, philosopher, and writer, he now gradually developed into a radical reformer. Here again he at first followed the steps of Occam, whom he soon left far behind.

While Wyclif was engaged in writing pamphlets, preparing addresses, influencing the transactions of Parliament, and making himself ready to appear before his spiritual judges, his restless mind was at the same time occupied with the solution of the deepest problems. He was examining the roots of questions which shook the heart of the entire century, and was striving to throw new light on their furthest ramifications. He made the idea of DOMINION, and the inseparably connected notion of possession, the centre of a comprehensive system, which, starting from a theological basis, gives a complete view of society, considered metaphysically, ethically, and politically. He developed this system in a series of separate works, forming a complete whole, to which he gave the name *Summa in Theologia*. In the first three books, which serve as a prologue to the whole, since the contents form the groundwork of his system, he treats of the "Divine Dominion," *i. e.*, of God as the Creator, Pre-

server, and Ruler of the world. He then discusses the divine commandments, from which all claims of man's dominion proceed. Man's dominion is next considered, first as it was in the state of innocence—the dominion of man over nature ; then as it is developed in civil society, or the dominion of man over man. In following out the leading ideas into the domain of religious and church life, the author treats in succession of the "Truth of the Holy Scriptures," of the church and its relation to the state, of the power of the Pope, and finally of Simony, Apostasy, Blasphemy—the chief evils from which the church was then suffering.

That which is original in Wyclif's *Summa* is not so much the ideas themselves as the manner in which they are established and deduced from one another. And although his dialectical style in the details reveals the mediæval schoolman, the plan and arrangement of the work bear the marks of a mighty thinker advancing on new lines and sustained by deep religious pathos. Besides, the individual views and dogmas, whether they are Wyclif's own, or found in earlier theologians and church fathers, frequently surprise us by their boldness ; and this boldness increases throughout the work, the composition of which extended over several years. The consistency of his fundamental views, though they are by no means original, is really impressive. He traces back all power and all authority to God, and besides God and what proceeds immediately from Him he recognizes nothing absolute, nothing unlimited—neither temporal dominion, temporal possession, nor spiritual authority. According to Wyclif, the church, in the truest sense of the word, is the company of God's elect. The ingenious organization of the hierarchy cannot stand before his plain but idealistic common sense and his strong biblical logic. He says every Christian should be a theologian and a lawyer, just as every man should be a Christian ; the parishioner who fails to censure an unfaithful and unprincipled pastor becomes an abetter in his sin. And as the difference between clergyman and layman shrivels up and disappears, so also does the difference between priest and bishop. In one of the nineteen propositions condemned

by Pope Gregory XI., Wyclif says that every properly ordained priest has plenary power to dispense all the sacraments, and therefore to pronounce absolution to every penitent for every kind of sin. And on the other hand, he says, the Pope can only loose or bind so far as he acts according to the law of Christ. Wyclif boldly asserted that no man could be excommunicated by the Pope, unless he were first of all excommunicated by himself. In his address of the year 1377,\* referring to the possibility of the Pope's laying England under an interdict, he says, with still more asperity and force: "If we could even suppose the apostle of Antichrist to break out into such evident lunacy, we should still have the consolation that mock censures of this sort are not binding before God." †

From making statements like this in such a form, there is, under such circumstances, but a short step to a direct opposition to the papacy. Wyclif would probably have taken this step at once, even if the schism of the Popes, some twenty months after the termination of the "Babylonian Captivity," had not given a new and greater shock to Christendom. In January, 1377, the papacy had returned from Avignon to Rome in the person of Gregory XI., who died March 27, 1378. The first words and deeds of Urban VI., who was raised to the chair of St. Peter on the 8th of April, awakened in Wyclif the liveliest hopes. The reformer was then occupied with the composition of the sixth book of his *Summa*, the portion which treats "of the Church." In the second chapter of that book he wrote: "Blessed be the Lord of our Mother (the Church), who in these days has given to our Virgin Pilgrim a Catholic head, an evangelical man, in Urban VI., who begins the work of church reform at the right end, viz.: with himself and his own household; for, from his works, we must believe that he is the head of our church." A certain fear, indeed, ought to accompany this belief, as to whether Urban would obtain the crown "of him that endureth to the end."

\*The reply in which Wyclif answered the question of the Parliament that met in October, 1377 (see above, p. 9).

† *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, 265. Compare F. D. Matthew, "The English works of Wyclif hitherto unprinted" (London, 1880, E. E. T. S.), p. xiii.



Even when the cardinal-bishop, Robert of Cambray, Count of Geneva, came forward in the autumn of the same year, as a rival Pope, under the name of Clement VII., and the church was divided into two hostile camps, Wyclif at first remained quite firm in his recognition of Urban. But as the scandal of the schism gradually increased, and as the "regular" Pope departed from the gospel ideal by his violent and reckless conduct, Wyclif became involved in anxiety and doubt, and his belief and hopes in the primacy of Urban disappeared. In a Latin sermon, delivered on St. Matthias's Day, probably in the year 1379, he says: "Let Urban only continue in righteousness as the true representative of St. Peter, and his election is valid. . . . But if he errs from the way, his election is void, and it would be better for the church to be rid of both Popes." \* What Wyclif here states conditionally, he states afterwards as his fixed opinion.

The declining respect for the Pope, and the corresponding increase in reverence for the Bible, the growing conviction that nothing useful to the good cause was to be expected from the English clergy, or even from the initiative of the English king, must have suggested to Wyclif the question, whether the great object he had in view could not be attained in another way and by means not yet attempted. It was, therefore, not by accident that at this very time—about 1378—the reformer began to see clearly the great mission, the accomplishment of which had been reserved by destiny for his closing years.

For the first time it now appeared to Wyclif, with a vividness expelling every doubt, that he was called, not only to influence theologians and statesmen by learned dissertations, Latin memorials and pamphlets, but above all to make accessible to the masses of the people, in their mother tongue, a truer knowledge of the Word of God. It is highly probable that this idea occurred to him by the experiment and great success of the English work, the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, which appeared in its completed form in the edition of 1377.

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\* Lechler, i. 580, note. In a later sermon in English, preached probably at Lutterworth, on St. Matthias's Day (select works, ed. Th. Arnold, i. 351), speaking of the election of the apostle, Wyclif likewise goes on to speak of the election of the Pope and the schism.

For the fulfillment of his mission Wyclif needed the support and aid of men after his own mind. Such men were not wanting at Oxford. He had around him there a narrow circle of thoughtful, learned men, whom he had converted to his views, and also a larger company of enthusiastic, eager disciples. The master now began to develop his Reformation plans on a large scale. He began to send out his itinerant preachers, to translate the Bible, and to issue tracts and pamphlets in the ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

The itinerant preachers had, for the most part, been trained for their calling by Wyclif himself; he gave them the models for their sermons, and frequently also the outlines. These preachers consisted of learned and unlearned men; but the number of the unlearned afterwards gradually increased, as did also the unordained who entered the ranks of the "pore preestes." This last appellation best describes the class. In long, dark-brown garments of coarse wool, barefooted and staff in hand, these new apostles went about from place to place. Stared at by the multitude, scoffed at and maligned by ill-wishers, they preached the gospel wherever they found a willing ear—in church or in chapel, on the market-place or in the street. Their sermons must have astonished the masses still more than their appearance; for their discourses were radically different from those of the popular pulpit orators of the time. They were not interwoven with legends and fascinating tales, after the manner of the *Gesta Romanorum*, nor were they adorned with the charm of verse and rhyme. They did not make their impression by a brilliant display of rhetoric, nor by endless divisions and hair-splitting distinctions. They had but little of that aroma, that tinge of poetry, which breathes throughout the language of the *Ancren Riwele* and even through the prose of Hampole, and which arises from the depths of a mystic and dreamy mind. The discourse of the Poor Priests was dignified, unadorned, sober, and severely practical. It was directed less to the imagination than to the sound common sense and the indestructible moral nature of the people. Short and concise in its arguments, the discourse was made to tell

by its illustrations from everyday life, but never by coarse or farcical analogies. Its effect was due to the earnestness with which it was delivered; to the boldness with which the speaker drew his inferences, and which recognized no authority but the Word of God; to the warmth of Christian love, which broke forth at times involuntarily. And finally the discourse owed not a little of its animation to the keen satire which the preacher directed, when occasion offered, at the prelates, monks, the Roman Curia, and the Pope himself. The arrangement of ideas was always clear and intelligible, though not always strictly logical. But its main characteristics were its constant references to the Bible, its use of Biblical language, and its teaching in the spirit of the Bible.

And now the great work, the translation of the Bible, likewise inspired and commenced by the master at Oxford, became a powerful assistance to his itinerant preachers. The translation of the entire Bible, which Wyclif now undertook, had never been accomplished in Saxon England; nor in the subsequent centuries was it ever once seriously attempted; although, in the course of the fourteenth century, important translations were frequently made which may be considered as significant attempts in the right direction. Wyclif's object was nothing less than a complete and faithful version of the entire Bible from the Latin Vulgate into English prose. In this gigantic undertaking Wyclif secured the assistance of one of his most learned and sturdy supporters, viz., Dr. Nicolas of Hereford. Nicolas began the translation of the Old Testament, while the master reserved for himself the smaller but far more important portion of the work, viz., the New Testament.

Also, the English tracts and pamphlets which were issued, mostly from Oxford, for the spreading of Wyclif's ideas and views, were not altogether the work of his own hand. Several of his students and followers seem to have helped in the production of these compositions; now and then even such as did not belong to his immediate circle wrote in the style and spirit of the master—and this is true not only of English versions of works first

written in Latin, but also of other works originally English. A whole literature of this sort, though only the remains of a once richer store, is still extant, and is connected by tradition with Wyclif's name; some portions of this have been proved by modern criticism not to belong to Wyclif, and other portions to be of very doubtful authorship. But everywhere in this mass of writings, both where criticism is in doubt and where it has not yet begun to doubt, there is a wide and fertile field, though not very enticing, for patient and methodic investigation. This field has lain hitherto almost uncultivated, especially that side of it which concerns language and style.

In his earlier English tracts Wyclif appeared principally as a moralist, and only secondarily as a dogmatist. His polemics, as a rule, were only directed against the abuses in the church, against traffic in benefices, against the idolatry in relics, the pride and wantonness of the clergy, and the greed and ambition of the Curia—in short, against the things which for above a century had furnished the favorite subjects of satire against the clergy in England. The ironical indifference of method employed in his violent attacks on official representatives of the church, and his fearlessness in facing the lightnings of the Vatican, must, indeed, have seemed remarkable. His habit of always referring again and again to the Bible must also have seemed new and strange, as he contrasted the pure simplicity of the divine Word with the confused subtlety of human invention.

But, on the whole, the difference between the *Vision of Piers Plowman* and Wyclif's tracts cannot have been great. Those who had been edified by Langland's poem must have now rejoiced to read similar thoughts in clear and vigorous prose.

After the year 1381 the whole question was changed. From that time everyone must have seen clearly that the Reform desired by the Oxford doctor meant a Revolution.

After a long struggle Wyclif had attained to clear and definite views upon the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He had at last drawn the inferences from a proposition stated in a philosophical work of his first period.\* He

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\* In the dissertation *De Ente*; see Matthew, p. xxiii.



had there taught that it was not even in the power of God Himself to annihilate anything existing. The application of this proposition to the Lord's Supper seemed to prove to him that the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation was contrary to reason.\* We need not here inquire what other chain of thoughts helped to bring the reformer to this same conclusion, nor the exact meaning he gave to his own doctrine. The literary historian has little to do with theology; it is scarcely his office even to attempt a psychological explanation of the manner in which individuals have tried to make the incomprehensible credible to themselves. We shall therefore content ourselves here with the remark that, in Wyclif's mind, the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist was not only contrary to reason, but also contrary to the Holy Scripture, and was as heretical as it was absurd; while his own view agreed in the main with the conception of Lessing in what he calls the doctrine of "pregnant symbols," and which, among the theories of the sixteenth century, came nearest to that of Luther.

In the summer of 1381 Wyclif published twelve theses on this subject, which he considered of the utmost importance, and, in academic fashion, declared himself ready to defend them.

The result of this step was to be foreseen. Though the Roman church accustoms its members to distinguish between the spiritual office and the person holding that office, *i. e.* between the man and the priest, yet it will be always easier for the people to distinguish between the priest and the doctrines he preaches, or the sacred acts which he performs. Ideas about the authority of the Pope and bishops were not so clearly developed and fixed in those days as they are now; but very decided views were held on the significance of the sacraments. An attack was now being made against these views of the sacraments, which touched the very centre of the whole system of worship, and even of religion itself—in so far

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\* Wyclif's mode of arguing does not very often allow us to see this connection; but we see it plain enough in the *Triologus*, iv. 4. (ed. Lechler), p. 256: *ponunt enim, quod mundum, quem Deus creavit, statim destruunt, quia materiam primam, quam Deus ordinavit esse perpetuam, destruunt*, etc.

as it attempts to establish its supernatural belief upon mysticism.

The more conservative minds must have felt somewhat frightened at this mode of attack. Many who had hitherto encouraged Wyclif's efforts began to hesitate, and withdrew their support. His antagonists already rejoiced in the confidence of an easy victory. William Berton, the chancellor of the university, belonged to this party. He convoked an assembly of doctors of theology and law to consider Wyclif's theses. As was to be expected, the theses were condemned, and the condemnation was published in a mandate by Berton. Two propositions, which contained the substance of those theses, were declared contrary to the doctrines of the church; and their statement or defense at the university was prohibited under pain of suspension, major excommunication, and imprisonment, and whoever listened to their defense would be liable to the punishment of major excommunication.

This was a heavy blow to the reformer; for a moment he seemed to stagger; but he did not bend and was by no means terrified. In a case like the present the statutes of the university gave him the choice of appeal to the king or the Pope.\* Wyclif appealed to the king. This time, however, the expected support of the crown was not forthcoming. His old patron, John of Gaunt, sent him word not to pursue the knotty question any farther. The accomplished publicist betook himself again to his pen; he wrote a Latin confession *De Eucharistia*, and a series of tracts and pamphlets.

The most popular of these pieces is that known as *The Wyket*, or little gate. From the gospel idea of the strait gate and narrow way that lead to life, the author passes to a discussion of the great temptation which threatens to mislead the faithful from the right way to the false law which is being imposed on the church, viz., the belief in transubstantiation. In nearly all his works written after this period Wyclif returns to this subject of transubstantiation, and his itinerant preachers discuss it in every form.

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\* See Matthew, noted before, p. xxv, note 4.

In the confusion and contests of this agitated period the position of Wyclif and his followers becomes clearer and clearer. They now form a distinct party, recognizable by a definite doctrine. Their connection with Rome seems almost severed ; for Wyclif has now given up all respect for the papacy. Henceforth he not only opposes both the rival Popes with equal energy, but takes a delight in proving how the office of the bishop of Rome, which is in no sense legally different from that of a simple priest, is especially qualified, by its very organization, to form a tool in the hands of Satan. "Deputy of the devil," and particularly "Antichrist," are his constant and curt expressions for the Holy Father ; and he plainly designates the papal legates as *legati a latere Antichristi*.

Besides the Roman "heresy" of transubstantiation, the Roman "Antichrist" forms a favorite topic in his tracts and even in his sermons. But the mendicant orders, whom he had indeed occasionally attacked at an earlier period, become, even more than the Pope, the constant butt of his polemics after 1381.

When we consider the bitter complaints and heavy accusations made against these orders in the satires of the fourteenth century, when we think of the mischief that they caused at the universities, especially at Oxford, according to the testimony of Archbishop Richard of Armagh, it is indeed astonishing that Wyclif should have waited so long before declaring war on these mendicant friars. For the way in which they, and particularly the Franciscans, observed, or rather did not observe, the rules of their order, was a regular distortion of the ideal of the gospel poverty which Wyclif had in mind, and which he expressly exhorted his own priests to follow. But it appears to have been the fixed policy of this thoughtful zealot not to make more enemies than necessary at one and the same time. And, no doubt, in this case the forbearance was mutual ; for the mendicant friars would take good care not to irritate unnecessarily such a famous scholar and influential writer. But the activity of the itinerant preachers now began to be a thorn in the flesh to the friars. They must have found some difficulty in

restraining themselves up to the time when Wyclif had the boldness to publish his theses on the sacrament. By this action he supplied his enemies with arms ; and they did not delay to employ them. Among the ten doctors of theology who helped to condemn the theses at Oxford, no fewer than six were mendicant friars ; in the four orders the reformer found henceforth his most decided and active opponents.

Henceforth Wyclif also showed no more forbearance. All the weaknesses, vices, crimes, that his sharp eye had detected in them, were now passed in review. Everything that preceding satirists had censured in the mendicants now came up again in Wyclif, and a multitude of other things besides.

The four orders are to him the new sects, their members, the arch-heretics, who prefer to the law of Christ their own new law, their "rule," which they do not even observe themselves ; they impose fables upon the people and withhold from them the Word of God ; in their activity they lay fallow their parishes and impoverish their parishioners ; they spread in the world a multitude of false doctrines, especially the great heresy of the altar sacrament. Wyclif renews this attack on every occasion—in learned treatises, in pamphlets, in sermons. When discussing almost any subject, he makes, by way of episode, an invective against the mendicant friars ; and we seem to see a certain pleasure in his eye as soon as the occasion offers for entering on this familiar vein. He even devotes whole books and instruments of accusation to this same topic, and it is appalling how many heresies and errors he is able to bring up in these works against his opponents. His anger often makes him witty ; he likes to combat his rivals with puns and nicknames. For the *falsi fratres* of the Bible, he borrows from Langland the pointed translation of "false freres." He continually designates the four orders by the word CAYM (Cain), made up of their initials.\* Never were the mendicant monks attacked with so much force and virulence.

But Wyclif had little need to arouse new enemies, or to

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\* Carmelites, Augustines, Jacobites (=Dominicans), Minorites (=Franciscans).



irritate the old ones to the uttermost. The conservative minds among the higher and middle classes were becoming more and more estranged from his cause. The great social rising of 1381 was not without its influence on this estrangement.

At the time when Wyclif was publishing his theses on the sacrament there was a great ferment going on among the peasants and day-laborers in Kent and Essex. The condition of these people was then pitiable indeed. The peasant class, especially, had to bear the brunt of all the consequences of pestilence and war and failure of crops—and the age abounded in scourges of this kind—and the prolific activity of the new Parliament had only taken from the people the means of legal redress, without improving their condition. With the exactions of the landowners, the chicanery of the lawyers and judges, the merciless recovery of tithes and offerings by the clergy, and, in addition, the refined begging of the mendicants and pardoners, there was little need of the increased taxes to destroy completely whatever show of prosperity the peasants enjoyed. By all sorts of trickery many free tenants were reduced to laborers, many laborers to serfs; and yet they still retained a lively feeling of their dignity and manhood. The discontent and class-hatred grew from day to day. These poor people, who were in want even of the necessary bodily nourishment, were frequently deprived also of their spiritual consolations by their appointed pastors.

Other leaders, therefore, came forward from among the people—eloquent and energetic men such as Wat Tyler, and dubious characters like the ex-priest, Jack Straw. These men knew how to stir the fire which was kindled by the reckless manner of collecting the poll-tax, and which burst into a flame almost simultaneously in Kent and Essex, and soon spread to the neighboring counties. The early success of the revolt, the cruel excesses of the insurgents, their march on London, the burning of palaces, manors, and abbeys, the murder of the archbishop of Canterbury, the dismay of the rulers and property owners, until they regained courage by the action of the Lord Mayor of London, who changed the

fate of the revolt by slaying Wat Tyler—all this is too well known. The victors made the vanquished pay dearly for the terror they had caused them. The concessions made in the moment of fear were immediately recalled; the sword of justice raged mercilessly not only among the ringleaders, but also among the misled multitude.

Wyclifites and mendicant friars mutually accused each other of having caused the peasants' revolt, or even claimed credit for the happy suppression of the movement. From the confession made by Jack Straw before his execution, it appears the insurgents had intended to sweep from the earth all possessors of property, and to spare only the mendicant friars. On the other hand, John Ball, who was also a clergyman and a great demagogue, is said to have confessed at his trial that he was a follower of Wyclif.

Many influences, doubtless, worked together to produce that social-democratic rising; but the main, real, and lamentable causes are, nevertheless, so evident that we need not inquire too closely into the effect of certain theories. We can easily imagine that some falsely interpreted passages from *Piers Plowman* turned the heads of many, and also that some misconceived doctrines and exhortations of Wyclif may have at first encouraged a few of the insurgents. If Wyclif assigned such an independent position to the layman in contrast to the cleric; if he condemned church property as an unjust possession, and allowed to the clergy no temporal authority or secular possession—such plain statements must have been better understood by the multitude, and remained clearer in their minds, than the doctor's oft-repeated doctrines on the duty of obedience to the authorities appointed by God—an obedience which the servant was bound to render even to his wicked master—or the duty of paying one's debts even to sinful creditors. The more enlightened persons who knew the reformer must have known that the revolt against the ruling powers, which was marked by so much bloodshed and atrocity, was directly opposed to Wyclif's principles and feelings. It was nevertheless unavoidable that, after the suppression of the riot, a reactionary current should set in among

the ruling classes against the cause represented by Wyclif.

But Wyclif was still at the head of a very considerable party. The inveterate hatred to the mendicant friars worked in his favor at Oxford, and his party triumphed at the elections of the chancellor and proctors of the university in 1382. The people were worked up more energetically than ever by his itinerant preachers, whose antagonism to the mendicants was the cause of frequent strife and even violence. The hierarchy was therefore the more determined to put an end to the whole mischief.

As successor to Simon Sudbury, who was murdered during the revolt, William Courtenay, the zealous prelate and active opponent of Wyclif, had been raised to the archbishopric of Canterbury, and received the pallium on the 6th of May, 1382. He summoned ten bishops and a number of doctors and bachelors of theology and law to a council, which met, May 21,\* at the Blackfriars in London. The proceedings of this council were interrupted by an earthquake, which was much talked of, and interpreted by each party in its own favor—the archbishop saying that the expulsion of ill-humors from the earth was a good omen for the expulsion of ill-humors from the church; but the council did not hesitate to condemn the twenty-four propositions laid before it; propositions which had been either publicly preached in the University of Oxford, or spread through the country by the itinerant missionaries: ten of these propositions were pronounced heretical and the others erroneous.

On this occasion, however, the decision did not remain a mere theory; it was soon carried into practice. Archbishop Courtenay was determined not only to condemn Wyclif's doctrines, but to suppress their propagation with all his power, and to compel his disciples to recant. The government gladly lent him aid. A great number of the "poor priests" were arrested, and their preaching, as far as possible, was suppressed. But it was no easy business to settle with the gentlemen of the university. Party spirit ran very high at Oxford, where most of the students favored Wyclif; the dispute was continued

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\* Compare Matthew, noted before, p. xxvii, note 2.

from pulpits and chairs with a real death-defying zeal. At last, however, the university authorities had no choice but to submit.

Wyclif's most prominent followers had to appear before the archbishop's commission. Several months passed before they were made tractable ; finally they all yielded and recanted—all except Hereford, who, on June 27, 1382, suddenly vanished. It is said he went to Rome to justify himself before the Pope, and was there imprisoned. Several years later he turned up again in England.

The master himself seems to have been treated, this time also, with indulgence. Possibly out of old friendship for Wyclif, the obsequious policy of the court made a halt, and put a bridle on the primate's zeal. It is uncertain whether Wyclif was summoned to justify himself before the convention which met at Oxford in November, 1382 ; at all events he was not induced to make any formal recantation. He was left without any personal molestation, though he could no longer remain at the university.

Wyclif now withdrew entirely to Lutterworth. The rural quiet of this secluded parish, where he passed his closing years, stands in ominous contrast to the agitation of the years immediately preceding. The reformer's personal associations were now mainly confined to his own parishioners, his curate, John Horn, and especially his trusty disciple and faithful fellow-worker, John Purvey, who was an inmate of his house.

The external quietness that here surrounded him only drove his restless spirit to a more intense activity. He was able to devote his attention much more regularly than before to the care of his congregation. There is no question but he still kept up his connection with the itinerant preachers, as far as they were able to escape the prosecutions of the bishops and to continue their work. But Wyclif's time was chiefly and almost constantly devoted to writing.

At the time of Hereford's sudden disappearance he had not quite finished the translation of the Old Testament, including the apocryphal books. The work had ad-



vanced as far as Baruch iii., v. 20. Wyclif himself continued it to the end ; he had finished the New Testament long before. The noble monument of the first *English Version of the whole Bible* was, therefore, now completed. This was a triumph for the master who had inspired the work and pushed it on with all his energy. This book forms an epoch in the history of literature.

A translator may take different points of view of his duty towards his original, as Goethe has shown in his own clear way, with regard to the translation of poetical works. Wyclif and Hereford, conscious of the difficulty of their undertaking, and out of respect for the Scriptures, strove chiefly to give a faithful rendering of the Vulgate—true to the sense, but also true to the words and even to the construction. Their common translation, therefore, has an air of singularity ; but by this the character of uniqueness belonging to the Book of Books is made the more conspicuous. In one sense it reminds us of the interlinear versions of an earlier period, in another of the masterly productions of the modern art of translating, which belongs to the third of those stages pointed out by Goethe, and is removed as far as possible from that freedom which characterizes such versions as those of King Alfred, a freedom to which the Middle Ages were so much addicted.

This oldest English Bible is honeycombed with Latinisms, such as the participial construction, the joining together of different periods by the relative pronoun, and a slavish imitation of the Latin perfect participle. This is true of the whole, but especially of the part translated by Hereford. The pupil is more diffident, stiff, uniform than his master. Wyclif shows in comparison a certain freedom in the arrangement of words and in the choice of expressions ; he does not always render the Latin word by the same English word, sometimes he employs two words where the original has only one, and he even incorporates some glosses in his text. He observes rather the rule of being true to the spirit ; Hereford, to the letter.

By his translation of the Bible Wyclif unsealed the purest source of Christian doctrine to the English people.

He continued to show forth in numerous writings his interpretation of this doctrine.

In his *Trialogus* he does this in a thoroughly scientific way—in the form and language of the schools. This work, written about 1383, gives us the whole of Wyclif's system at the time of its ripeness and completion. In four books he treats first of God; then of the world; thirdly, of virtue, sin, and salvation; fourthly, of the sacraments, of the servants of the church, especially of the mendicant friars, and of the end of all things. To make the style more lively, he employs the form of dialogue. The whole subject is developed in a conversation between three speakers—a genuine philosopher, an unbelieving sophist, and an enlightened theologian, who bear the abstract and strange-sounding names of Alithia, Pseustis, and Phronesis. We need scarcely say that the dialogue is not quite in Plato's style. The conversational form, however, tends to keep the reader from feeling wearied, so that, with close attention, one is able to follow the expositions of this acute thinker and thorough student of the Bible.

A large number of *English Sermons*, delivered to his congregation, is one result of the practical activity of the learned theologian while at Lutterworth. We have already indicated their general character, as far as that was possible, in the description we tried to give of the discussions of the "poor priests." What specially distinguished the sermons of the master from those of his disciples was the acuteness of the reasoning and discrimination, and the tone of authority in which he generally and unconsciously spoke.

In their language and contents Wyclif's sermons differ little from his *Tracts* and *Pamphlets*. But in the latter he traversed a wider field and went more into details; and the choice of his subject, not being confined to a Bible text, allowed a more systematic treatment of his theme. The reformer did not want for topics, even at Lutterworth; for from that sequestered parish, as from a quiet haven, he viewed attentively and with a lively interest the doings of the outside world. It is simply astonishing how, in a few years, at an advanced age, and

with a delicate frame, he could find time and strength to discuss exhaustively so many varied subjects ; to elucidate passages in the Bible and catechism ; to write treatises, sometimes in a didactic, sometimes in a polemical, form ; to treat of dogmatic and moral questions relating to the church and church reform, worship and the sacrament of the altar, Pope and prelates, parsons and the "poor priests"—and all these discussed by turns in Latin or in English.

How little his mental vigor had abated was shown by a new conflict on which he entered. A formal crusade was going to be started against Clement VII., the rival of Pope Urban II. By employing all ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical powers, an expedition was actually got ready in England under the command of Henry le Spencer, the warlike bishop of Norwich. Wyclif exposed with cutting severity the unchristian character of this enterprise, and the ways and means of getting men and money for it. He condemned the effort with such energy and convincing force that the papal thunder itself could not have sounded louder. And though the reformer was not able to prevent the crusade, he had at least the melancholy satisfaction of seeing how, after some slight advantages, it came to a disgraceful end.

About this time Pope Urban is said to have summoned the incorrigible agitator to appear before his judgment seat at Rome. But however this may be, death soon called the indefatigable warrior before another, an impartial, judge. Wyclif died from a stroke of apoplexy on St. Sylvester's Day, December 31, 1384.

The world lost in him one of the most sturdy heroes that the fruitful soil of England ever bore. The reformer of the fourteenth century does not belie his origin ; we see it in that practical tendency which, with all his idealism, pulsates through his veins ; in that measured boldness which marks all his doings. The great reformers of the sixteenth century throw his figure somewhat into the shade. Wyclif does not possess the genial vein of a Luther, nor the stern greatness of a Calvin. He does not rouse our enthusiasm like the former, nor impress us with fearful admiration like the latter. But

he is, perhaps, better balanced than either, and unites many of their excellences, though he possesses these excellences in a less degree ; the impression he produces is therefore weaker and less direct. On his contemporaries his personality exercised an irresistible fascination ; but it is only, as it were, indirectly and by reflection that we can appreciate Wyclif to-day, while the names of Luther and Calvin arouse our imagination at once.

In commendation of his character it is sufficient to say that he was one of the most moral, active, and courageous men that ever lived. There are many men who can be brave under command, many who reveal a restless activity in some special line. John Wyclif, however, was one of the few who venture to take the initiative and accept the responsibility, and who, remaining true to their ideals, look the unknown boldly in the face, and extend the sphere of their activities ever further and deeper.

The immediate practical result of his life was in a great measure thwarted by the conditions of the times, and especially by the violent reaction of the period that followed. His was essentially the office of a forerunner, a preparer of the way. The identity of the civilization of the European nations is seen in the fact that the people of other nationalities took up and continued the work begun by the great Englishman.

English literature owes an incalculable debt to the reformer. He gave to it, indeed, no single work of art ; but he gave new ideas and a multitude of stimulating influences.

Wyclif was a great thinker, not a great literary artist. His Latin is hard to digest ; his English is, indeed, clear and nervous, but rather stiff. Like Hampole, he was too much filled with his subject to care greatly about the form ; but, in contrast to Hampole, he seldom allows himself to be carried away by his imagination, and is almost always guided by his intellect. He is satisfied with one short characteristic phrase for the thought as it occurs. To give diversity and color to his diction by the unexpected use of a striking word in the right place, to heighten the effect by a wise economy in the arrangement and expression—such ideas never entered his head.



He has no idea of the art of introducing a new subject, of preparing the reader or rousing his expectation; he usually enters at once *in medias res*. But on the other hand he possesses in so much higher degree the art of educating unexpected reflections and consequences from a Bible text. He is indifferent to the proper rounding off and fullness of his periods, and to the natural transition from one sentence to another. He frequently interrupts the logical sequence by digressions, and, on a smaller scale, the symmetry of his sentences by the insertion of parentheses. He is not afraid of repeating the same thought in the same form in different works, and even often in the same work, nor does he avoid the frequent repetition of one and the same word. A series of chapters, paragraphs, phrases, are often introduced in the most fatiguing manner by the same formula, and are rather strung on to each other than joined together. The effect of his composition, therefore, depends mainly on its intellectual contents; it is only by accident that the impression is deepened by the phraseology. Occasionally he hits upon the most suitable expression. Words of heart-stirring power frequently escape from him, when his feelings are really warmed up. But a biting sarcasm or a quiet humor is more common in his writings, especially when he is attacking the mendicant friars; and there is then no lack of drastic touches which impress themselves on the memory. Such touches, in conjunction with many plain and often blunt illustrations and allusions, tended much to the success of his discourses.

Wyclif's literary importance lies in the fact that he extended the domain of English prose and enhanced its powers of expression. He accustomed it to terse reasoning, and perfected it as an instrument for expressing rigorous logical thought and argument; he brought it into the service of great ideas and questions of the day, and made it the medium of polemics and satire. And above all he raised it to the dignity of the national language of the Bible.

The example set by Wyclif was imitated by many even in his lifetime. The works of his followers, however different in worth and importance, are not only written

in the spirit of the master, but also generally show the same excellences and the same defects as his own productions. It would be useless here to give the titles of a number of books in proof of this comparison; and to give an individual characterization of the different writers of his school is still impossible in the present position of research.

But among all those who promoted or continued the work of the reformer, next to Nicolas of Hereford, John Purvey has the greatest claim to the gratitude of posterity. It was he who—presumably under Wyclif's inspiration and at first with his assistance—undertook a revision of the Bible translation, and completed it four years after the master's death. This revision is really a new work, wherein not only part of the errors of the original version are corrected, but the Latinisms throughout were replaced by good English.\* In this new form, which was multiplied by numerous copies, the Bible of Wyclif penetrated among all classes of the people, and even during the periods of the bloody persecution of the Wyclifites it continued its quiet work without interruption.

Purvey's language agreed on the whole, in its dialect and coloring, with that of his master. Wyclif's Northumbrian birth exercised no great influence on his idiom, at least in its written form; his many years of residence in Oxford, and to a certain extent his life at Lutterworth, left a much greater mark on his language. The Midland dialect with a strong Eastern coloring forms the basis of his idiom; but this idiom, owing to the geographical position of Oxford, is in many respects tinged with that of the southern counties. The language of Nicolas of Hereford is much more marked by southern, or rather western, elements. But the English of Wyclif and Purvey grew up in harmony with the spirit of progress which gradually raised the written language of the

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\* I give a few illustrations from the Gospel by Matthew, Chap. II. v. 8. *Wyclif*: "And he, sendynge hem in to Bethlem, saide."—*Purvey*: "And he sente hem in to Bethlem, and seide." In another place, Wyclif writes: "that and y cummynge wirshipe hym."—*Purvey*: "that y also come, and worshiþe hym." v. 9. *Wyclif*: "The whiche, when thei hadden herde the kyng, wenten away."—*Purvey*: "And whanne thei hadden herd the kyng, thei wenten forth."

period far above the level of dialects, and by their common work that progress was guided and advanced.

## V.

The Renaissance, now beginning to dawn, had even a still greater effect in fixing the future uniformity of the language than the prelude to the Reformation, whose first champion occupied our attention so exclusively in the last chapter. This new impulse also originated on the banks of the Thames, but more to the east, where the reaction between the mighty, heaving river and the sea begins. London, Westminster, and Windsor are the centres from which first radiated all over England the sentiment for a higher form of beauty and a freer progress towards a nobler standard of humanity.

At the time when the conflict between church and state was most violent, and when Wyclif was beginning to draw upon himself the eyes of patriots, there was considerable talk at the English court about a young man named Geoffrey Chaucer, who belonged to the king's household, and who both by his personality and his connections enjoyed the favor of the royal family. He was of a pleasant and attractive disposition, remarkable by the thoughtful, dreamy expression of his face, by a certain tendency to stoutness, which did not, however develop till later years, and by his susceptibility to love; he was, besides, a pleasant companion, obliging and modest, happy and good-tempered, but frequently too taciturn; occasionally, however, he could show a roguishness, and create astonishment by his superior humor. He was a passionate friend of books, and often passed half the night reading in bed. On many occasions, even thus early, he had appeared as a miracle of learning to those about him—he read Latin as easily as French; he spoke a more select English than others; and it was known that he had composed, or, as the expression then was, *made*, many beautiful English verses.

The young poet belonged to a well-to-do middle-class family who had many far-reaching connections, and

even some influence with the court. The poet thus found early opportunities of catching a glimpse of the great world, and of observing the higher ranks of society. Even as a boy he may have heard his father, John Chaucer, the vintner of Thames Street, London, telling of the marvelous voyage he had made to Antwerp and Cologne in the brilliant suite of Edward III. in 1338. When a youth of sixteen or seventeen, Geoffrey served as a page or squire to Elizabeth, duchess of Ulster, first wife of Lionel, duke of Clarence, and daughter-in-law of the king. He bore arms when about nineteen years of age, and went to France in 1359, in the army commanded by Edward III. That campaign, which was ended by the treaty of Bretigny, was not, indeed, distinguished either by its exploits or its results ; but it was, nevertheless, eventful enough for the young warrior, and presented to the eyes of the rising poet a rich profusion of motley, living pictures. He saw a grand display of warriors and knightly pomp ; the foremost generals of the age—the king, Henry, duke of Lancaster, above all the Black Prince—at the head of their troops ; marches and countermarches through the provinces of northern France ; the ancient regal town of Rheims besieged with desperate energy and finally abandoned, unsubdued ; numerous smaller expeditions, skirmishes, and plundering raids and, in the intervals, hawking and hunting and other feudal sports ; and finally, personal dangers to the poet himself, who was taken prisoner by the French, though the king, indeed, soon had him ransomed, on the 1st of March, 1360. For an English poet of that period Chaucer had seen and experienced, even in his early years, an immense amount.

This epoch formed a sort of “Indian summer” to the age of chivalry, and its spirit found expression in great deeds of war as well as in the festivals and manners of the court. The ideal which men strove to realize did not quite correspond to the spirit of the former age. On the whole, people had become more worldly and practical, and were generally anxious to protect the real interests of life from the unwarranted interference of romantic aspirations. The spirit of chivalry no longer formed a



fundamental element, but only an ornament of life—an ornament, indeed, which was made much of, and which was looked upon with a sentiment partaking of enthusiasm. But now, when devotion to chivalry was no longer the simple outflow of a dominant idea, but rather the product of a pleasant self-conscious reflection, the life and doings of aristocratic society took a very mixed color, and a character hard to be defined. Minds ideally constituted strove to fill the traditional molds and formulas with a really ethical substance, and, by trying in their own way to transpose these ancient forms into action, developed a really tender and humane disposition. The majority of people rejoiced merely in the splendor, and in the festive, dignified existence that raised them above the commonplace and distinguished them from the vulgar crowd. But in every case there was the intermixture of an incongruous element. The real cavaliers of that age remind us somewhat of Don Quixote, sometimes uniting with a maidenly coyness and modesty the most overmastering desire for battles and adventures, which impelled them over all the world; sometimes thwarting the calculations of a prudent policy by the momentary outbreak of an overstrained sentiment.

In its external appearance and surroundings the aristocratic society of the time also makes a somewhat fantastic impression. With extraordinary stateliness society shows its delight in excessive luxury and overloaded ornamentation. In the dignified and imposing architecture of the age, ornamentation frequently plays too large a part. Brilliant tapestry hangings, wall pictures, colored windows, surprise us more by their gorgeousness than by their harmony. In forestry and horticulture, trees are allowed to grow to their full development, but effects are produced more by a symmetrical arrangement of the groups and individuals, and by luxuriant masses of rich foliage, than by picturesque variety. In the dress of the higher classes we remark a growing preference for striking and variegated colors, length and width being arbitrarily decided by fashion.

In the midst of this outside world of motley pomp and throbbing life Geoffrey could observe the doings of high

and low in various situations. He was early initiated into court intrigues, and even into many political secrets, and found opportunities of studying the human type in numerous individuals and according to the varieties developed by rank in life, education, age, and sex. The young poet must have been especially interested by the current forms of intercourse between man and woman, and with his early developed sensuousness and easily excited imagination, which we can certainly attribute to him even then, we may well believe that in this domain he remained no idle spectator.

Lady worship was quite as common in that age as it had been before in the ruling principles of chivalry. The French erotic poetry had developed a strict code of the duties which husband owed to wife, and lover to mistress. In these duties mediæval ideas were seen mixed up with the influence of old Roman poetry, and especially with the love lore of the experienced Ovid. But the further the idealistic views—which at first underlay the principles of woman worship—disappeared from life, the more extravagant became the forms which that worship assumed, at least in the effusions and precepts of poets; and to this extravagant adoration occasional outbursts of sarcasm and cynicism formed no refreshing contrast. Chivalrous society in England was much less affected than in France with the prevailing tendency which contained such glaring contradictions. Yet even in the court circles in England could be seen that mixture of a refined gallantry and a rude sensuality, of an artificial and unnatural enthusiasm, which often becomes a sort of mockery, and a realism which verges on the vulgar.

The literature which not only illustrates this mental and moral condition, but also helped to bring it about, begins with the *Romance of the Rose*—that singular and marvelous poem, which, in its two very dissimilar parts, is typical, in more ways than one, of the culture of the vanishing Middle Ages. Taken all in all, this work of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, was still the most celebrated and best known book in the French language in the time of Edward III. All the standard French poets of the age were under the influence of one

or other of these two poets, or even of both, in so far as they continued to ornament their poems with mythological and allegorical figures, and in so far as they rarely expressed their feelings, either in epic or lyric poetry, without the intermixture of subtle reflections and an abundant but rather cheap display of learning. The most eminent of the court poets of that period was unquestionably the aged, but still vigorous, Guillaume de Machault, who, in numerous poems and often in very artistic rhymes, knew how to vary the great theme of love with spirit and frequently with grace. In his whole tendency he reminds us more of Guillaume de Lorris than of Jean de Meung.

In poetry and life, fashion required an educated young man, especially one in the service of the court, to fall in love at the earliest opportunity, and, if possible, hopelessly. Geoffrey cannot have failed to satisfy the demand of high society. In his youth he certainly lost his heart more than once. The vivid traits in the character of a coquette, whom he describes in the earliest of his extant poems, are assuredly not taken from mere observation, but from the most intimate personal experience. And the ideal womanhood which hovers before his mind in the same poem has unquestionably many points of resemblance to a definite earthly personage by whom the young poet's heart and eye had been ensnared. A great passion, which affected the poet for several years in that decisive period between youth and manhood, has left its distinct traces in several of his works. The object of this passion is now unknown. Presumably the lady-love of the young enthusiast was far above him in position and rank, even after his promotion—in 1368 or 1369—to the rank of a royal scutifer or armiger, the highest among the minor appointments at the court. At any rate Geoffrey found out that his first love was hopeless—but he could not tear the image from his heart. The passion must have had deep and lasting effects upon his disposition and on the development of his talents; and this experience, if it did not first kindle his poetry, at least directed it in its destined course.

Nothing has been preserved from his early writings. In the numerous erotic poems of this period, which have

been destroyed by an unpropitious fate, in the *songs*, *ditties*, *lays*, *roundels*, *virelays*, Chaucer, no doubt, took as his models the French love-poets, and without much difficulty or endeavor he probably surpassed them in simplicity of form and expression.

But the fact is very remarkable that from the first, or at least from a very early period, Chaucer wrote in the English language—however natural this may seem to succeeding generations in “The Father of English Poetry.”

The court of Edward III. favored the language as well as the literature of France; a considerable number of French poets and “menestrels” were in the service and pay of the English king. Queen Philippa, in particular, showing herself in this a true daughter of her native Hainault, formed the centre of a society cultivating the French language and poetry. She had in her personal service Jean Froissart, one of the most eminent representatives of that language and poetry; like herself he belonged to one of the most northern districts of the French-speaking territory; he had made himself a great name, as a prolific and clever writer of erotic and allegoric trifles, before he sketched out in his famous chronicle the motley-colored, vivid picture of that eventful age. We also see in this period young Englishmen of rank and education trying their flight on the French Parnassus; not, indeed, with the intention of continuing the Anglo-Norman tradition, but rather in a close and clearly pronounced connection with the taste and tendency emanating from beyond the Channel and dominating the English court.

To these Anglo-French poets there belonged also a Kentishman of noble family, named John Gower. Though some ten years the senior of Chaucer, he had probably met him about this time. They were certainly afterwards very intimately acquainted. Gower belonged to a knightly family, possessed of lands in Kent and in other counties in the south and east; he had received a very careful education, and loved to devote the time he could spare from the management of his estates to study and poetry. His learning was in many respects greater than Chaucer’s. He had studied the Latin poets so diligently that he



could easily express himself in their language, and he was equally good at writing French verses, which were able to pass muster, at least in England. He took great interest in jurisprudence as well as in history and politics. His intellectual horizon was, nevertheless, much more limited than that of his famous contemporary. He lacked that free unbiased glance, that powerful originality of conception, which distinguished Chaucer. His poetic talents were rather tame ; he had a particularly receptive nature, and a decided mastery in the arrangement and form of verse, but was inclined to devote his powers to subjects that had no relation whatever to poetry.

To his assimilative powers and his consequent tendency to imitation, we owe Gower's French ballads.\* What were considered as ballads at that time in France differed very much from the old Provençal dance songs, and resembled them only in the number of strophes and the refrain ; the strophes were rigorously confined to the normal three (without counting the envoy or half strophe often found at the end), and the refrain had lost much in extent and importance, and no longer served as theme at the beginning of the piece. The easy grace of the movement had given place to a somewhat stiff formality of tone, or a pedantic monotony, which suited the didactic tendency of later ballads ; for these later ballads, no matter what their contents, regularly tapered down to some general aphorism or even to a dull joke. Gower managed this difficult artistic form with great cleverness, for it suited well his inclination and talents. His French verses are very smooth for a foreigner, although the cæsura changes position with an Italian freedom ; his strophes often have a fresh fluency, and the thoughts which these partly erotic, partly moral poems convey are sometimes really pretty.

But Chaucer did not let himself be led astray by examples such as these. It is possible that he would have found writing in French no easy task, even if he had at-

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\* Gower probably commenced this kind of writing very early, although it is doubtful whether any of the effusions of his earliest period are extant among the French ballads which we possess from his pen.

tempted it. At any rate his bourgeois origin, and the seriousness of his vocation as poet, threw a determining weight into the scale and secured his fidelity to the English language with a commendable consistency.

There was no national literary tradition in England which Chaucer could have taken up or followed. Middle English literature of the preceding epochs had made many attempts at a more refined form of poetry,—namely, court poetry,—but had never attained to it. Its main character was either decidedly religious or of a minstrel kind. Only in the middle of the fourteenth century do we see in the west of England, where noblemen of high rank began to interest themselves in the national literature, the commencement of a provincial school of poetry striving for a higher art ; and this school, following the old national alliterative verse in its form, and foreign models in its contents, treated romantic subjects in an archaic style. But this poetry, although widely cultivated, could never establish itself firmly in the southeast of England, on account of the nearness of foreign influences and the presence of the court. This poetry, moreover, was only yet in the bud in the years 1360 to 1370, and Chaucer had but a very distant knowledge of it, if, indeed, he knew of it at all. On the other hand many English romances in the traditional style must have been known to him from his youth, and their spirit doubtless continued quietly to influence his own productions, even after he had come to know the French originals and had begun to entertain no very high idea of their artistic value. No doubt he had also read with pleasure and profit works like Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* and had enjoyed the erotic lyrics of the vagrant clergy, but especially in the successful effort which these "vagrants" had made in the department of the romance, particularly in Kent and the adjacent counties.

However poor such literature may have seemed in the judgment of the young poet when compared with the rich and brilliant poetry of France, however little it corresponded to the demands of the society in which he moved and the mental atmosphere he breathed, this local literature formed nevertheless the necessary premises for



his own first attempts in poetry; it supplied him not only with what might be called the raw material of style wherewith to work, but also permanently influenced the spirit and conception of his poetry. Just as the language in which he wrote shows an East-Midland dialect with a Southeastern coloring, so, also, in attempting to analyze the character of his poetry, we discover elements which point to the same districts. The good-natured candor of a Robert de Brunne, the eminent talent for story-telling and humorous characterization so peculiar to the author of the *Fox and the Wolf*, are found again in Chaucer in an enhanced degree, united with other qualities—so much does talent depend upon the soil from which it springs.

The language which Chaucer used probably differed very little from that of the court, in so far as the court spoke English; his language must have been very similar to the idiom prevailing in the greater part of London, and was very largely influenced by it. The literary development of this idiom, the mixed character of which necessitated a very careful selection, is undoubtedly first due to Chaucer. Before him one or two individuals at the court of Edward III. may have written or dictated a letter in English, although very seldom; it is even very probable that before him some courtier or royal page had tried to write some English verses. But the formation of English court poetry is nevertheless due to Chaucer, and to Chaucer alone.

Chaucer's youthful attempts in erotic lyrics, as we afterwards learn from the testimony of Gower, met with great applause and gradually obtained a wide circulation. A sad event now gave the poet the melancholy occasion for a work of greater art. On September 12, 1369, died the Duchess Blanche, heiress of Henry, duke of Lancaster, and wife of Prince John of Gaunt, who received with her his investiture to the duchy of Lancaster. This lovely lady, carried off in the flower of her life, had been by her beauty and virtue the chief ornament of the English court. All were in the deepest mourning. But it was the special province of the poet to eternize the image of the departed, and to reconcile the pain, by glorifying

the memories it evoked. The poet may also have been influenced on that occasion by the desire of becoming more intimately acquainted with the duke of Lancaster, who was about his own age, and who, in his many-sided interests, may have previously observed the rising poet's powers. Thus originated the poem on the *Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse*, better known as *The Boke of the Duchesse*.

In this poem Chaucer had a double task: he had to celebrate the excellences of Blanche and to depict the sorrow of her mourning lord. With these there was a third essential, of a purely personal kind; the nature of the poem itself must be such as to confirm or anticipate the intimacy beginning, or desired by the poet, between himself and the duke. Now there was in the poetry of the Machaults and Froissarts an ordinary, and indeed trivial enough device, by the application of which the English poet obtained his threefold object at once. He represents himself as meeting with the duke, who makes him the confidant of his love and grief. He does not, of course, give us either the name or title of the duke, but introduces him under a slight disguise in a romantic neighborhood; viz., as an unknown knight, who meets the poet in the loneliness of the forest, and whose despairing grief excites the deepest sympathy. The apparent age of the unknown knight does not correspond to that of the duke. His discourses contain no direct reference to well-known persons or events; we learn only the name of the beloved lady, "and goode Faire White she heet." It is not expressly stated, although plainly hinted, that the beloved was also the spouse. But the whole interview is represented as taking place in a dream, and many references and situations cannot be clearly understood on account of their dreamy indefiniteness.

The poet has at first considerable trouble in inducing the knight to speak. But when the ice is once broken, he shows a great desire to communicate; it is the knight who does nearly all the talking; he becomes excessively loquacious in his descriptions and also in his complaints and invectives. He states very few real facts, but numerous phrases, learned allusions, and subtle distinctions. A

multitude of ideas and images, which were very common in French literature since the *Romance of the Rose*, appear here for the first time in an English dress—such as reminiscences from classical antiquity or even from the Old Testament, long spun-out allegories, witty and uncouth touches from the wisdom of the mediæval schoolmen. However much the mind may be distracted by all this learning, parenthetically introduced, we nevertheless frequently hear the voice of real passion from the strange figure, and in some passages of the knight's discourse—as in his invectives against Fortune, or in his complaints, given in antithetic form—the student of Shakspeare is reminded of the great bard's earlier works, especially *Romeo and Juliet*.

The knight's description of his early youth, where Chaucer may have had in mind his own early days; how he first dedicated himself to the service of love, as it were by destiny and a feeling of duty; how he then accidentally met with the beloved, and what impression this encounter made upon his heart—all these points are full of freshness and charm. The central and culminating passage of the poem is the picture of the beloved; it is somewhat defective in execution, but excellent in conception.

We see how the young artist has all the traits of ideal womanhood full and vivid in his soul, while his hand is not yet sufficiently practiced to copy the internal image. Nevertheless he makes the attempt, and from what he succeeds in saying, we perceive the refined æsthetic and moral sense of the poet. The kindness, truthfulness, serenity, and freshness which characterize the "*Faire White*"; the nice moderation which is seen in her movements and carriage, and in her whole deportment; her bright and sensible expression, her indifference to the pain of love of which she is the cause, all these traits unite to make a beautiful and charming whole.

The poet makes use of a strange artistic device for the purpose of retaining the attention of the reader throughout the whole long discourse. We learn pretty early that the knight has suffered some irreparable loss; after some long digressions he then describes to us his beloved; but

only at the very end and in a few dry words does he say that it is this lady whom he has lost ; and then the discourse is finished up in this strange and abrupt manner :

“ Is that your losse ? By God, it is routhe.”

In this case Chaucer has unquestionably missed his aim and spoiled the effect of his poem. But if we look a little closer we shall discover that that artistic device does not stand alone, but is connected with other similar artifices into a formal system. The whole dialogue, especially at the commencement, is carried through by means of little touches, which have the effect of retarding the progress ; not, indeed, in the way such touches are employed in the epic for the attainment of its beautifully proportioned fullness, but as they are employed in the drama—to enliven the whole development as well as the separate scenes, to unfold the characters, and to work out the motives. Thus early, in the *Book of the Duchess*, we see Chaucer’s dramatic tendency. With him the dialogue becomes a kind of dramatic scene ; although, indeed, the length of many of the speeches, with their repeated digressions into the domain of general knowledge, is by no means dramatic. But Chaucer, like the true dramatist, sees the speakers vividly before him, and has in his mind’s eye the facial expression which accompanies every word they utter. That which we see developed into the highest art in his later poems is thus present in germ in this work of his youth.

Besides the long Dialogue the *Book of the Duchess* really contains two other parts, viz., an Overture, and before that a Prologue.

The Overture—if I may use the expression—consists of a series of pictures which pass before the sleeping poet in agreeable succession, and lead up to the Dialogue ; viz., a bright May morning ; awaking in a chamber with beautifully painted windows (this also belongs to the dream) ; sweet singing of birds, with which other tones are soon interblended ; the exciting picture of a hunt with a description of the breezy freshness of the forest ; and, within this forest, the transition from noisy life to the deepest solitude. In these descriptions we find reminis-



cences, and even borrowings, from the *Romance of the Rose* and similar poems, closely interwoven with the poet's own vivid ideas and his expressions of a deep sympathy with nature.

The Prologue is very attractive and important, and its length exceeds the usual proportions. Its principal motives are borrowed by Chaucer from the *Dit de Morpheus* by Guillaume de Machault; and indeed the influence of this French poet is very clearly traceable throughout the whole *Book of the Duchess*, as well as in its individual parts. But even in the Prologue, where this influence is most evident, the freedom and independence of the English poet is just as clearly evident. What Chaucer borrows he makes really his own, and brings it into a new connection, suited to the higher purposes of his own poetry.

At the beginning Chaucer pictures to us his peculiar condition. For a long time he has been suffering from sleeplessness; this brought on the feeling, very similar to dizziness, which oppresses him. We are only left to conjecture that this condition was brought about by his unfortunate love affair. The poet describes it as a disease that he has suffered eight years, without being a whit nearer his recovery: "for there is but one physician that can heal me—but that is gone! What is not to be, must needs be left." Lying in bed one sleepless night, he reads a book of various contents; further on we learn that this book was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the favorite book of his youth and, indeed, also of his later years. He was especially affected by the story of Ceyx and Halcyone (XI, 410 ff.). After the model of Machault, but going back independently to the original, he gives us the fable in a free version, but without mentioning the transformation at the end. He lays most weight on the description of Halcyone's state of mind—she is yet ignorant of her husband's fate, is anxiously awaiting his return, and hovering between fear and hope; at last she can no longer endure the terrible uncertainty, and implores Juno for deliverance therefrom.

Chaucer also describes at considerable length, and with the introduction of a mixture of humorous au-

dacity, the dwelling of Morpheus, the god of dreams, and the scene which there took place. Certain peculiarities, which distinguish him as a story-teller, are already plainly seen, such as his elaboration of the principal points, while many other things are hurriedly passed over; the preference for detailed psychological descriptions—in fact, peculiarities again revealing his tendency to the dramatic form. The story of Ceyx and Halcyone now reminds the sleeping poet of the power of Morpheus, and so he addresses a fervent prayer for sleep to the god (this trait is also taken from Machault), which is soon granted. The relations between the Prologue and the main part of the poem are now clear enough. Halcyone, mourning for her absent spouse, suggests the knight mourning for his lost beloved. And the same Morpheus who reveals to Queen Halcyone the certainty of her husband's death sends to the poet the dream, wherein the whole significance of the death of Blanche is poetically revealed to him.

The *Book of the Duchess*, on the whole, is certainly no masterpiece—neither in its conception nor its execution—and in both respects it imitates the French poetry of the period. But the plan, within the conventional bounds and in spite of all imitations, nevertheless manifests a decided originality; and although numerous portions of the story depend on a free and happy imitation, there is very much that is highly significant and drawn from personal experience. In this work an effort is made to say more than the poets of that age were accustomed to say—an effort to produce effects which no Englishman had yet attempted. The poet here, however, tries strange methods, showing that his style and taste were not yet sufficiently developed. The language, in itself simple and expressive, appears sometimes greatly overcharged; it was afterwards a constant peculiarity of Chaucer's to let himself go easily along in a free and flowing diction, and therefore also in this early work he very often transgresses the proper limits in the length of his episodes and in his repetitions.

The whole work is recognizable as the production of a young poet, who has observed closely, and learned much



at the court, who has formed his own opinion on many things, and has perhaps paid too great attention to book lore. We see in him a powerful genius facing life and the world, but who is also of a thoughtful and contemplative nature, full of glorious anticipations and already rich in experience and culture; who has easily appropriated the tricks of poetic technology, especially the mastery over language and verse; but who still shows much room for improvement in the inner contents of his work, and a vast curtailment in the form of his expression.

In every kind of practical art, the instrument employed is of the greatest importance for its progress. In poetry, next to the perfection of the language, very much depends on the nature of the verse. Chaucer wrote the *Book of the Duchess* in the traditional form of the short-rhymed couplet; nor does he handle it any more cleverly than the average poets who preceded him; but, by the frequent application of the "enjambement" (or beginning the sense in one line and completing it in the next), he removes the chief defect of this kind of verse, while he often brings out its characteristic excellences in the most spirited and lively manner. He distinguishes himself, even in this poem, from most of his contemporaries by the purity of his sonorous rhymes.

His great familiarity with French court poetry must have forced him to adopt a new and more artistic form of verse, which indeed would not have been foreign to the older English poetry if the Anglo-Norman poems, during the period of their first bloom, had cultivated a closer connection with the national English epics or even with the artificial lyrics of France. We refer here to the old romance verse of ten syllables, which the Italians happily baptized the "*endecasillabo*," or eleven-syllabled line, as their softer language encouraged the use of an eleventh syllable in the form of a weak or feminine ending; this verse, by its harmonious arrangement and firmly locked construction, is adapted, above all modern meters, for presenting an elevated and highly poetic subject in a euphonious tone and in lengthy but unlimping recital. When Chaucer introduced this measure into the English language, he took care to preserve rigorously the original

number of syllables, which had not been done by his predecessors in introducing the eight-syllabled romance verse. But much more regularly than the French and Provençals, and yet without pedantic stiffness, he made his verse advance with a sort of iambic gait, and he was therefore able to give up and exchange for a freer arrangement the immovable cæsura, which these poets had always made to coincide with a foot-ending. Thus the decasyllabo, or ten-syllabled verse, assumed under Chaucer's hand a form which makes it suitable to the character of the Germanic languages, and which only differs from the endecasyllabo of the Italians by a very fine marking of the rhythm. In this way the instrument was constructed which the greatest poets of England, and in part also the Germans, were afterwards to use for their most exalted creations.

It is highly probable that Chaucer first applied his new form of verse to lyrical pieces, and in the scheme of a seven-lined isometrical stanza. This form of stanza occurs indeed before his time, both among the Provençals and the Northern French poets, and was therefore not invented by Chaucer. But he used it with such partiality, turned it to such artistic account, and handled it so consistently in the disposition of his verse, that it may, nevertheless, be considered as his own property, and is rightfully called by his name.

The earliest extant poem of Chaucer's in which this kind of stanza occurs is the *Compleynte to Pite*: it is hard to fix the time when this piece was written, but it is probably included between the years 1370 and 1372.

In a certain sense this poem marks the termination of that period of his life affected by his unfortunate love, of which mention is made in the introduction to the Book of the Duchess. In the compositions of later years the old wound appears to be closed, though still frequently painful.

The poet had loved long, and for many years had sought an opportunity to awake a sympathy in the breast of the beloved, but had never ventured to declare his passion. At last he took courage, and with a full declaration on his tongue he goes to his beloved—when, in

the decisive moment, he sees plainly that she has no sympathy in her heart, that he has nothing to hope, and so he finds his satisfaction in pouring out his pain in verse.

This was probably the import and occasion of the remarkable poem which, in its details, still offers many a riddle for the assiduous interpreter to solve. The idea is clothed in the ordinary style of the allegorical school of French erotic poets. The sympathy that should have dwelt in the bosom of the beloved is personified, as are also all her other internal and external excellences—such as Perfect Goodness, Exquisite Beauty, Mirth, Serenity, and whatever other qualities she may possess. But the deeply affected feelings of the past repeatedly break out through the conventional dress which is spread over the whole description. There is a pleasant harmony of word and verse and sense in this delineation ; its energy is not clogged, nor does it fatigue the reader, although it suffers from that colorlessness unavoidable in such abstractions. Compared with the *Book of the Duchess*, we can perceive here a decided advance in the command of form. In the more artistic construction of the new verse, and in the sonorous stanzas, we see how the poet's sense of elegance of diction has been quickened.

## VI.

While Chaucer's poetic talents were thus developing, his aptitude as a practical man of the world and man of business was likewise increasing. The duke of Lancaster, whose favor he had won by his *Book of the Duchess* (if he did not previously possess it), must have come to know him also through business relations, and must have appreciated his cleverness and prudence in worldly affairs quite as much as his geniality acquired in his converse with the muses. At the court and in the council of the aged king the influence of John of Gaunt was supreme just at this period ; and it is very probable that this influence had a great effect on the future career of the poet. From the summer of 1370, when Chaucer went to the Continent on a royal commis-

sion—perhaps to Flanders, France, or Aquitaine—he was frequently employed by Edward III. on important business, whether as confidential messenger, attaché to an embassy, or finally as commissioner on some trade policy, for which he must have seemed especially adapted by his early connections and family traditions. In the capacity of a commissioner on commercial policy he went to Genoa in 1372, and from there to Florence; before November 22, 1373, he was back again in England.

This journey was of the greatest importance for the full development of his genius.

When Chaucer went to Italy the new light of the Renaissance had just arisen there, and beamed in brilliant splendor from the intellectual summits of the time. The mist through which the Middle Ages had looked on classical antiquity was beginning now to clear away, and to the anxious, searching eye appeared an unexpected fullness of the richest life in ever-widening circumference; whilst that which was already known, now being seen in clearer outlines, took possession of mind and heart with irresistible might. The powerful movement in culture of that epoch, which prepared a regeneration of thought and poetry and action for mankind in Europe, is connected mainly with three great names—Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio.

The relation of these three men to antiquity is very different—as different as their character and genius.

Dante's immense originality and productive energy, united to a will immovable and conscious of its aim, fixed the assimilative powers of his mind within very definite bounds. And besides, he was only acquainted with classical antiquity through the narrow circle of Latin authors and books current in the Middle Ages. He was therefore only able to appropriate from the ancients what corresponded with his own ideas of the world, or what was suited to advance his own poetical or practical aims. But with the depth and breadth of his genius, and with the greatness of his character, this little indeed implies a great deal; and though he has not extended our theoretical knowledge of antiquity, though he cannot be num-



bered among the creators of classical philology, he was on the other hand the founder of a new poetry inspired by the spirit of antiquity. As the father and master of Italian poetry, the creator of the *Divine Comedy*, as has been said, was not merely indebted to the Roman poets for maxims of worldly wisdom, mythological figures, and some poetic passages and motives. Dante was also indebted to the works of the ancients for his just perception of form, and for his high aim. From them he learned the secret of putting deep subjects into a classical form. In the First Canto of the *Inferno*, he says to the shade of Virgil, who is to him no longer a magician, but a poet and a sage : "Thou art my master and my author ; from thee alone I derived the beautiful style which has done me honor," this remark, though perhaps too strong and too one-sided, shows thoroughly his relation to antiquity.

The melody of Dante's verse, the force and pregnancy in the mighty rush of his diction, the rigorous choice of expression and of the position of every word, the art of placing with a few touches, sometimes with a single stroke, a plastic image before the mind—all these qualities show us the pupil of the ancients ; a pupil, indeed, who in power of imagination and depth of meaning far excels his Latin masters. But it was in their school he conceived the idea of what a work of art really is ; it was from them he gained that higher view of the poet's mission as it is laid down in the Roman word *Vates*. And not only as artist, but also as man and thinker, did Dante feel the vast significance of the antique conceptions. The idea of the old Roman manly virtue, the *virtus*, forms a living power in his soul. The antique conception of the state was seized by him in all its greatness as by no other in his age. Since, therefore, everything was worked out in his mind into harmony and into the closest connection with a great and minutely elaborated system of mediæval Christian ideas, we find a result that stands alone of its kind and can scarcely be expressed in words. Standing in the centre of mediæval culture, and one of the most zealous defenders of authority in church and state, Dante is at the same time the first great representative of

individualism, which has hardly ever found a haughtier expression than in the words :

Ond' io te sopra te corono e mitrio.

By the great divine work of his life Dante gave the crowning termination and the finished expression to mediæval ideas, and at the same time founded the poetry of modern times.

Petrarch's importance in the history of culture can be perhaps most vividly realized by a comparison. Petrarch was the Voltaire of the fourteenth century ; the prophet of human learning, as Voltaire was of human emancipation and enlightenment. The similarity in the exterior and interior lives of the two men is much greater than may appear at a superficial view. Both stand in the centre of the intellectual movement of their age, and, by a busy interchange of letters, in close connection with their most prominent contemporaries and with crowned heads. Both received in their lifetime the highest recognition, viz., an adoration approaching to deification and, as dearest goal of their ambition, the laurel crown. In both we admire the many-sidedness of their talents, their extraordinary powers of assimilation, their restless activity of mind. Both show a sensibility and vanity developed to the same degree. Both possessed the eye of genius ; if we are astonished at Voltaire's gigantic intellect, by which he is able to educe the practical side from the most difficult problems, and the spirit by which he gives the most simple and striking form to his thoughts ; we are, on the other hand, astonished at Petrarch's sympathetic intuition, which enabled him, from absolutely inadequate models and materials, to bring to recognition a buried world in all its vast importance for noble human culture. Both Petrarch and Voltaire were filled with enthusiasm for their mission, and dominated by the desire of making proselytes. Both knew how to strike various tones in their writings ; Petrarch, however, generally speaks as a poet and a prophet, Voltaire as a philosopher and a man of the world. In both a theatrical trait can be perceived—in Petrarch, indeed, more than in Voltaire, because the ideality of his aims



and the high demands he made on the spiritual and moral perfection of man formed the most glaring contrast to the weakness of his own character. His diaries and letters reveal the strange union of a remarkable self-knowledge with a continued deception of himself and of others.

Petrarch was the first who threw himself with complete abandon into the ancient classic world of thought and form, and who pressed forward to a clear understanding of antiquity, as far as the inadequate and almost solely Roman materials at his hand enabled him to do so. He was the first who undertook in real earnest to revive antiquity in himself, and who had at the same time the will and the power to revive it in his contemporaries and in posterity. In him the finest feeling and the most unbounded enthusiasm for the beautiful creations of antiquity, and for the importance of the ideas contained in them, were united to an unprejudiced scientific perception and the gift of a rare and vigorous diction. An opponent of astrology and other mediæval superstitions, an enemy of scholasticism and a warm admirer of Plato, a zealous collector and exponent of Latin manuscripts and other ancient relics, an elegant writer of Latin poetry and prose, he originated both the intellectual worship of the ancient world and the learned science of philology.

As Italian lyricist Petrarch succeeded to the inheritance of the Provençal Troubadours, and of the Florentine school culminating in Dante—however much he emphasized his independence, especially of the latter. But numerous motives in his poems, frequently also his expressed sentiments and way of thinking, and, above all, the kind of style he employs, reveal the pupil of the ancients. Petrarch's lyrics are less spontaneous, and on the whole less deep, than Dante's poetry of the same kind; they are also less abstract, and in their manner of expression less hard to understand; but they are always grand in their wealth of thought, as in their perfection of form (attained by incessant filing); they present an artistic work of the highest kind, to which succeeding generations have looked up with admiration, and

which became a model for the following lyrists, not only of Italy, but, in the heyday of the Renaissance, of almost all the civilized nations of western Europe.

Boccaccio, the third of the "great Etruscan three," was of a very different nature. He was altogether a child of this world, endowed with a gay and sensual disposition, with a great eagerness for knowledge, and (even in early youth) with a desire and capacity for story-telling; in character an all-round and amiable personality. Stimulated as a student of classical antiquity by Petrarch, and as a poet by the influence of Dante, he possessed neither the intuitive historic glance of the former, nor the immense depth and poetic force of the latter. But notwithstanding his admiration for his two great predecessors, he managed to maintain his independence sufficiently to be able, in many essential points, to follow out his own prudent and inventive course; and with his unwearied diligence and astonishing fertility he attained to great results in poetry and learning.

His historical and mythological writings in the Latin tongue, especially his fifteen books, *De Genealogiis Deorum Gentilium* (a mine of all kinds of knowledge for his contemporaries), were followed up by a period of the most diligent collecting of philological works. In his Italian epics he attempted, with little success, to imitate the style and tone of ancient poetry by using classical subjects. On the other hand he succeeded in depicting with great truthfulness nicely conceived psychological conditions, and in carrying the reader along with him by his vivid portrayal of the passions. He also created for the growing epic poetry of his country some important elements for its poetical technology; in particular, he gained for it the strophe, the *ottava rima*, which is best suited to its movement, and which in the hands of Ariosto became such an excellent vehicle for a rich and brilliant fancy. Boccaccio himself by no means sounded all the secrets of the octave, for indeed his verses, as a rule, are only mediocre. Rhythm is for him a robe in which he moves with ease, but not with any special grace; while Dante is as much at home in it as in his skin. Boccaccio therefore owes the greater part of his fame to Italian

prose, which, in spite of many Latinisms and a too artificial construction of his periods, is full of color, life, energy, and grace, and, in its excellences as in its defects, is the purest exponent of the intellectual character of the clever, imaginative, naïve, pedantic, sensitive, and wanton poet.

In this prose form, which he disfigured indeed at first by too great a profusion of images, he then created the Italian romance as well as the biographical essay, and gave a new significance to the cyclical form of tale-writing—in his *Ameto* by the idyllic framework and the interspersed eclogues, for both show him as the progenitor of the later Arcadians; in his *Decamerone* by the poetic inventions employed and the highly developed art of his narration and characterization.

When Chaucer went to Florence, Dante had been already sleeping in his Ravenna tomb for over half a century; Petrarch and Boccaccio were still alive, but were nearing the goal of their terrestrial career. It is uncertain whether the English poet while at Padua met with Petrarch, although it seems probable. But certain it is that the fame of these three men was then beginning to fill all Italy, and that something of their works gradually became known to Chaucer.

It may be assumed that the poet of the "Boke of the Duchesse" and the "Compleynt to Pite" was not then sufficiently prepared to appreciate the works of these great minds in their fullest extent. Some things must have been plain to him at once; others appeared gradually clearer to his mind; many things remained a secret to him to the last. The position he took up with reference to each of these three great Italians was therefore also very different.

He stood furthest off from Petrarch, notwithstanding the warm admiration with which he mentions him in the grandest of his own works.\* Petrarch's great excellences and great weaknesses lay equally distant from Chaucer's own character. Even to the last the English poet was incapable of throwing himself into the spirit of a by-gone world. Even to the last his philological acquire-

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\* Canterbury Tales, Clerkes Prologue, line 26 ff.

ments remained limited, his taste for Latinity undeveloped. Petrarch's Latin writings may therefore have impressed him by their "high style"; but he was able to appropriate very little from them. And Petrarch's Italian lyrics must have seemed far too ethereal to his solid manly nature. Chaucer, indeed, afterwards often showed a lyrical disposition, but no lyrical genius. And notwithstanding the admiration he undoubtedly felt for the Italian's perfect form of expression, in his own few ballads and envoys he always employed a measure only slightly varied from the ordinary French poems. Indeed he amused himself by recasting one of Petrarch's sonnets\* into an epic poem of seven-lined stanzas.

Boccaccio drew him, in the course of time, into a much closer relationship, for the temperament of this Italian was by nature closely allied to his own. He borrowed from this poet a multitude of suggestions and motives, and even two whole epics. But the way in which he worked up and assimilated the borrowed material manifests in a most remarkable manner the greater poetic depth of the Englishman.

If Boccaccio supplied our poet with much of his material, it was the influence of Dante that supplied the form—one might almost say the spirit—of his art. Chaucer could hardly have been able to follow the intensity of Dante in all its height and depth; but he was quite capable of appreciating his high character and high style. What a powerful impression the *Divine Comedy* made upon him from the first is seen by the numerous reminiscences of this great poem which occur in his work after 1373—viz., passages copied or translated, and motives employed repeatedly in various forms. Whoever follows closely Chaucer's own style and manner of composition cannot doubt but he allowed Dante to influence him in the same way as Dante himself had been influenced by the ancients and especially by Virgil. But the most important elements in this domain are exactly those which cannot be demonstrated, but merely foreshadowed; they depend on the ideal of style present to the poet's mind and half unconsciously followed

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\* *S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento*; Compare *Troilus I*, st. 58-60.



by him. Chaucer's ideal was necessarily very different from Dante's ; but, as we shall see, it borrowed many traits from him, and had others in common with him from the first.

A special condition was now added to make the English poet, at the period of his Italian journey, more susceptible to Dante's influence. The journey took place at a time when Chaucer was going through an intense religious crisis. We do not know when or how this crisis began. Perhaps it was connected with certain great events and currents which can be traced in that period. We can only say with safety that it was marked in the poet by a close self-examination and bitter self-reproaches.

A worldling has to reproach himself with all sorts of things, especially when he lives at a court like that of Edward III. and is intimate with a John of Gaunt. Chaucer reproached himself with having passed most of his time in idleness, with his worldly disposition, and with his sinful inclinations. He naturally seeks in religion the power for self-conquest and improvement. He was a faithful son of the church, even though he had his own opinions about many things. His rationalistic reflections on religious problems have sometimes a skeptical tinge; but his spiritual needs always led him back again to Christian views, and naturally to the form of Christianity in which he was brought up, viz., the Roman church. He was specially attracted by the eternal-womanly element in this system, which finds its purest realization in the person of the Virgin Mother Mary. In moments when life seemed hard and weary, and when he was unable to arouse and cheer himself with philosophy and poetry, he gladly turned for help and consolation to the Virgin Mother.

Whenever such a state of mind continued for any length of time, it even determined the contents and purport of his poems. And thus, under the influence of his Italian journey, Chaucer composed a few pieces of religious poetry.

In the first place must be mentioned an attempt in the domain of legendary poetry—*The Lif of Seinte Cecile*. The choice of the subject was certainly fortunate. Among

the legends glorifying maiden chastity and strength of faith, that of Saint Cecilia is distinguished by a certain charm well becoming the patroness of music. The angel that watches round Cecilia, to protect her chastity, is advantageously contrasted with the devil, who is generally made to appear in such poems in order to be overcome by the heroine. The motive of the scene in the chamber is also found in the legend of Alexius, but with a change of rôle little to our taste; while the figure of Cecilia in the same situation has something really touching. An æsthetic effect is produced by the fragrance of the roses and lilies of the two wreaths given by the angel to Cecilia and her spouse Valerian. Even Valerian's unconverted brother Tiburtius remarks the fragrance, though his sight, indeed, requires the purification and enlightenment of faith and baptism before he can perceive the angel and the wreaths. A great effect is produced at the conversion of Tiburtius by the apparition of the old man in dazzling white, bearing in his hand a book in golden letters. The exhaustive theological discussions with which the legend is clogged in the ordinary versions, and even in Chaucer's, are by no means necessary, though they may be traced far back. But a really disturbing effect is produced by the far too aggressive conduct of Cecilia in her examination before the prefect Almachius, who in the end rather impresses us as a worthy gentleman—as far as that is possible in his quality of persecutor of the Christians.

Chaucer was able to draw his materials from various versions—in Latin, French, and English. The most celebrated collection of legends of the time, however, was the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus à Voragine; and Chaucer had a special opportunity for seeing this work, as he had sojourned a short time before in Genoa, where Jacobus was once bishop, and where his name must still have been fresh. There is no doubt, besides, but Chaucer used this *Golden Legend* for his poem; the only question is, whether he used some other version as well, or whether he had perhaps a corrupt Latin text bearing Jacobus's name. The latter is the more probable supposition in a work like Chaucer's, which was undertaken with feelings of earnest piety without any artistic pretensions.



Yet prey I you that reden that I write,  
 Foryeve me, that I do no diligence  
 This ilke storie subtilly to endite.  
 For both have I the wordës and sentence  
 Of him, that at the Saintës reverence  
 The storie wroot, and folwed hire legende,  
 And pray you that ye wole my werk amende.\*

True to his programme Chaucer contents himself in his story with the modest rôle of a translator. He does not allow himself to make the slightest change in his original, and scarcely an addition worthy of mention; and he even retains the manifest errors of the Latin text. These may have been caused by interpolations, or omissions. He seems, however, to have made a few contractions. It cannot have been without intention that he devoted only a few words to the trial of Valerian and Tiburtius before the prefect; for a much stronger light is thereby cast on the analogous scene between the prefect and Cecilia as the dramatic climax of the story.

On the whole Chaucer appears almost more dependent on his original than the English poets who had previously treated the life of St. Cecilia. His own property in the story is merely the form, but this raises him far above his predecessors. His simple, noble language presents as great a contrast to the childish style of the earlier legends, as his sonorous seven-lined stanza does to the Northumbrian short-rhymed couplet, or even to the South English Alexandrine.

If, however, the individuality of the poet is kept back in the legend itself, it becomes so much the more pronounced in the Introduction. Here we learn that the *Life of St. Cecile* was the fruit of the repentance which Chaucer felt for his past life and wasted time. He starts out with a description of Idleness, which delivers man over defenseless to the evil one, and which, as in the Romance of the Rose, is here called the Portress of the door of Pleasure. He undertook the present work in order to keep out of her path. He prays the Virgin to aid him in his efforts, and sings her praises in three raptur-

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\* Second Nonnes Tale, line 78 ff.

ous stanzas, of which the contents and even many of the terms are taken from the last canto of Dante's *Paradiso*.

Vergine, madre, figlia del tuo figlio—

Thou mayde and moder, doughter of thy sone.

An ardent prayer, proceeding from the poet's overflowing heart, is added in three other stanzas, two of which may here be quoted :

Now help, thou meeke and blisful fairë mayde,  
Me flemed wrecche, in this desért of galle ;  
Thynk on the womman Canacee, that sayde  
That whelpes eten some of the crommës alle  
That from hir Lordës table been yfalle ;  
And though that I, unworthy son of Eve,  
Be sinful, yet accepteth my bileve.

And of thy light my soule in prison lighte,  
That troubled is by the contagión  
Of my body, and also by the wighte  
Of erthly lust, and false affección ;  
O havene of refuge, O salvatiön  
Of them that been in sorwe and in distresse,  
Now help, for to my werk I wil me dresse.\*

The *ABC*, another memorial of Chaucer's worship of the Virgin, probably belongs to the same period as the Legend of St. Cecilia. It is a hymn to the Holy Virgin in twenty-three stanzas, the initial letters of which go to make up the alphabet. The source and model of the English poet here was the French Guillaume de Deguileville, whose *Pilgrimage of Human Life*, written about 1330, contains a similar poetic alphabetical hymn in its first part, which treats of the pilgrimage of the soul. The stanza of the original, which consisted of twelve short lines of very involved rhyme, was changed by Chaucer into the more dignified and serious form of a stanza of eight decasyllabic lines. The imitation is also rather free in things of greater importance ; the French stanza most frequently sketches out the thought in a general way, while the corresponding English stanza gives

\* Second Nonnes Tale, line 57 ff. Here again I have made a slight alteration.  
—B. t. B.

it more exhaustively, or enlarges upon it; in other cases when the parallel stanzas have the same contents, there are often deviations in the arrangement of the thoughts. The different parts of the English poem are of very unequal value. The whole, though very fresh in conception, has, nevertheless, in an æsthetic sense, the appearance of an intentional work of art, which gives us an opportunity to admire Chaucer's great mastery in the management of language, verse, and stanza.

It is very possible that the earnest religious mood of which we are speaking called forth other literary productions also. A prose work, of which only the title remains, may probably have been composed at this period. It was the translation, whether complete or fragmentary, of the celebrated work of Innocent III., *De Miseria Humanae Conditionis*. If we did not know it from Chaucer's own words, we should have difficulty in believing that he ever sank to such a depth of asceticism.

In a disposition like his, fond of worldly pleasures and æsthetic ease, such a fit of exclusive piety could not extend beyond a certain limit, especially as the poet was adverse to fasts and enjoyed a good drink. The world gradually reasserted its claims upon his heart, and he began anew to show his interest in things of the earth, though with a more mature and serious mind.

His external circumstances, also, were now such as to necessitate a partial termination of his youthful extravagances, whether of a sensual, æsthetic, or of an ascetic kind. In the summer of 1374 the royal page was appointed to an office which was, indeed, fairly remunerative, but which laid upon the holder a great amount of very prosaic work and much responsibility: on the 8th of June, 1374, the king appointed him controller of customs on wool, skins, and tanned hides, and on the lesser wine-dues, at the port of London, with instructions to keep the official register with his own hand and to do everything relating to the office in person. About this time, also, Chaucer appears to have married. From the year 1366 we meet in the records and accounts of the royal household a certain Philippa Chaucer, whom we should probably consider as a relative of the poet.

She was at first a maid of honor (*domicella reginæ*) to Queen Philippa, and in this capacity was granted a yearly pension of ten marks on September 12, 1366. After the death of her great patroness, about 1372, she entered the service of Constance, the eldest daughter of Peter the Cruel of Castile, whom John of Gaunt had just married and brought home from Spain as his second wife. On August 30, 1372, the Duke of Lancaster had also granted to Philippa Chaucer a yearly income of ten marks. On June 13, 1374, this Philippa Chaucer appears as the wife of Geoffrey Chaucer, who henceforth draws, in the form of a life pension, the yearly income granted to her by their common patron. The intimacy of the poet with John of Gaunt was thus made still closer by his marriage. It was certainly not without reason that the document granting him that pension speaks of "the good services which our much beloved Geoffrey Chaucer has rendered us," as well as of "the good services which our much beloved Philippa, his wife, has rendered to our honored mother, the queen (God rest her soul), and to our dearly beloved wife, the queen."

We are not informed as to the character of Philippa Chaucer, nor of the nature of the relations existing between her and her husband. Only on rare occasions—and in the fourteenth century still rarer than to-day—does a poet give the reader a direct look into his domestic life; his mental disposition, however, is determined by many various factors, and his opinions of women in general, as seen in his works, do not necessarily depend on the experiences of his own married life.

At all events Chaucer moved in quite new circumstances after the summer of 1374. As the head of a family and a busy official, he occupied a very respectable and solid position, the responsibility of which was further increased, after 1375, by having several wardships consigned to him. He had no further need to be afraid of falling into the arms of idleness, even if he should become unfaithful to the muses. But such infidelity did not lie in his disposition. Now, when he had to steal every hour devoted to poetry and study from the time occupied almost wholly with official

business, his thirst for knowledge became so much the greater and his diligence the more unflagging. The period of religious enthusiasm had given place to a more practical worldly disposition and view of life, but left its mark in a greater earnestness and in a certain maturity, which spurred him on and fitted him for scientific work. He entered more deeply than before into philosophical speculations. The popular manual of the Middle Ages, the *Consolatio Philosophiæ* of Boëthius, appears to have fascinated him strongly about this period. The book acquired a remarkable influence over the nature and form of his thoughts. At the same time he was occupied with deep astronomical studies, which he has very frequently utilized in his poems—sometimes in the fixing of dates, sometimes, in connection with astrological or mythological conceptions, as poetical adornments to his stories. But although in his thirst for knowledge, and in the interests of poetry, he entered deeply into the secrets of astrology, we can see from numerous satirical passages in his writings that he believed its superstitions just as little as did Petrarch. With great zeal he took up again the reading of the Latin, and particularly of the Italian, poets. Among the latter it was mainly Boccaccio who, by his epic *La Teseide*, first re-awakened Chaucer's own productiveness.

The *Teseide* is a very remarkable composition and most instructive for the literary historian, who can here find illustrated in tangible form the truth that, in a work of art, the subject, the form, the spirit of the age, the species of poetry, the individuality and style of the writer, must all be in the most complete and absolute harmony.

The story is so devoid of action that we can hardly state it, in its shortest form, without spoiling it: Two friends, Palamon and Arcite, belonging to the same noble family, are taken prisoners of war and held as captives in the flower of their youth. In this situation they behold from the window of their prison the beautiful Emilia, the sister-in-law of their victorious foe, walking in the garden, and both fall in love with her at the first



glance. After some time, on the intercession of a friend, Arcite receives his freedom, but with orders to quit the hostile land on pain of death. For a long time he wanders far away ; but is at length unable any longer to withstand his passion for the beloved, and this passion has made him so thin and pale that he thinks he can go back without being recognized. He is not mistaken in this hope ; under a feigned name he returns to the country and to the court of the hostile prince, who admits him into his service. He is thus again in the vicinity of his beloved, and has often the happiness of seeing her. Her womanly acuteness recognizes Arcite, but out of sympathy she keeps secret her discovery. But, unfortunately for Arcite, he has the bad habit of talking aloud to himself about what he has most at heart. One of his monologues is overheard by a servant of Palamon's, who informs his master of all the secrets thus obtained.

Jealousy of the happy rival is now violently aroused in the heart of the imprisoned lover. By stratagem Palamon manages to escape from his prison, and rushes, armed, to the grove where Arcite is in the habit of repairing, in the hope of meeting him there. He finds him asleep. The reunion of the two rivals has at first the appearance of old friendship. But Palamon soon comes to the point ; he demands of his friend to renounce his love or to fight him for life or death. After great reluctance at so hard a choice Arcite consents to fight. In the heat of the contest they are surprised by Emilia and her brother-in-law, the prince, with a large company. Both are now recognized ; their strange tale, their love, which had burst the bonds of early friendship and overcome their fear of every danger, now comes to light. They are in the power of their enemy ; but he magnanimously pardons them, commanding them, however, each at the head of a hundred heroes, in a solemnly appointed tournament, to fight it out in his presence, for the hand of the fair Emilia.

The day of the tournament dawns. Before the battle Arcite prays ardently to the god Mars ; Palamon entreats the help of Venus. Emilia addresses her supplications to Diana, which are left unanswered. The ex-

traordinary battle begins. The god of War grants Arcite the victory he has prayed for ; but Venus also answers Palamon's entreaties. She calls up a Fury out of hell, which terrifies the horse of the victor and casts him to the ground. After his short triumph the consequences of the fall begin to be felt. Arcite is at the point of death, and now the conflict between love and friendship comes to a crisis in his breast. Everything he possesses, and especially the hand of Emilia, he bequeaths to his friend Palamon ; then, bidding a long farewell to both the loved ones, he expires. After he has been buried with stately pomp, and his friend has erected a temple to his manes, the prince commands Palamon and Emilia to execute the will of the departed and to be joined in marriage. Pain and delicacy make them hesitate and delay ; but at last they yield to the tender passion, which brings Palamon to the goal of his wishes, and gives to Emilia an ardent, loving spouse.

The story is thus so simple, so meager, that we do not need to seek its source in any mediæval tale, and still less to suppose a lost Greek or Byzantine romance. Some traits and situations—such as the love at first sight, the conflict between love and friendship—may indeed have been borrowed by Boccaccio from such romances ; but the whole, which appears to have been composed partly for artistic purposes, partly to satisfy his own cravings, must have been Boccaccio's own production, and this assumption pays, indeed, no special compliment to his powers of invention. In any case, the connecting of the main story with the legends of Theseus and Thebes must be attributed to Boccaccio. He represents Emilia as the sister of Hippolyta, the Amazonian queen, whom Theseus has conquered and espoused. Palamon and Arcite are of the house of Cadmos, and fight in the army of Creon, upon whom Theseus makes war for his cruel treatment of the bodies of the "Seven." After Creon's overthrow the two Theban cousins fall into the hands of the victorious Theseus and are taken prisoners to Athens.

Boccaccio thus took the epic background of his story from the *Thebais* of Statius, to whom he is also more

indebted for the main body of the tale than is generally supposed.

It was a most unlucky thought to localize a story so sentimental, and so weak in action, in the Greek heroic age. Nevertheless, many a mediæval poet would not have refrained from making out of the fable, in his own way, an attractive romance of adventure, full of incidents and episodes. But Boccaccio had very different pretensions from an ordinary French *trouvère*. Full of classical reminiscences, enraptured with the beauties of Virgil, Statius, and Homer, he intended, in all seriousness, to write an epic after the style of the ancients. Dante had said that among the Italians no one had sung of arms. Boccaccio wishes to fill up this void, and sings of Theseus. The first of his twelve books is wholly devoted to the battle of the Amazons; and almost to the end of the second book, where Palamon and Arcite appear, it actually seems as if Theseus would be the real hero of the poem.

This want of unity of action is by no means the worst consequence of Boccaccio's untimely attempt. The sterility and emptiness of composition, the lack of uniform color in the execution, are much more censurable. These defects were, in the nature of things, unavoidable. The main story was as little adapted for treatment in the style of the ancient epics as was the poet's genius for writing upon heroic themes. This double miscalculation is seen at every step to be most deplorable.

We feel how the poet has to force himself, and how he is afraid of falling away from the proper style. Under the impression that the epic style naturally requires great breadth of treatment, he frequently gives long descriptions of things which are of but little interest to him and of none at all to the reader. He names and characterizes conscientiously all the heroes who take part in the tournament with Palamon and Arcite, he occasionally intercalates mythological and other episodes, describes the funeral of Arcite, and the games which were then held—and all this in a mixed, jumbled style, swollen with classical reminiscences and a great deal that is very unclassical. The climax of this pseudo-epic tediousness is reached in his eleventh book, stanzas 70 to 88. The interior of

the temple erected by Palamon on the spot where Arcite's body was burned is adorned with figures symbolical of the incidents in the hero's life. These figures are now all described, and thus the whole history, which we have previously learnt, is told a second time !

When Boccaccio is off his guard, or when his memory leaves him in the lurch, we perceive frequently a very un-epic haste in his descriptions, which, indeed, sometimes become mere dry references. The fear of ruffling his epic dress keeps a heavy hand on the poet's imagination—there are no lifelike secondary characters, no happily invented or pleasantly executed subsidiary motives, no artfully arranged transitions. His composition thus hovers between repletion and emptiness, scarcely ever attains to an epic breadth, and in no case does it breathe the true epic ease.

The only really attractive parts are some of his descriptions of nature—such as the garden surrounding the temple of Venus—and especially his portrayal of the sentiments ; these latter are thoroughly plastic and modern ; or, to be more correct, they reflect at once the Italy of mediæval times, and the Italy of the period as tinged by the Renaissance. The heroes are somewhat too sentimental for our Teutonic taste, and we cannot always believe in the reality of their sentiments ; but the humane and noble disposition of the poet is here very charmingly expressed, and we admire the artistic delicacy of the little effective touches by which he brings out the tenderest shades of feeling. Our regret is, therefore, so much the greater that Boccaccio should have handled the material for a simple, touching story in so uneven a style, and often with such unnecessary diffuseness, interlarding and trimming it with all sorts of epical and mythological accessories.

Chaucer had the tact to use for his version of the *Teseide* the seven-lined stanza, which resembles the *ottava* of the original, but yet has the advantage of a different and more beautiful arrangement.\* But his artistic

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\* In the seven-lined stanza the division into three parts has a good effect : ab | ab || bcc. The *ottava* is divided into four, and the number of the fourth or concluding rhymes is too few in proportion to the threefold introductory rhymes : ab | ab | ab || cc.



sense is still more clearly shown by the confidence with which he suppressed in his copy the duality of action which injures Boccaccio's *Teseide*. He omitted altogether the first book of the original, with the description of the fight of the Amazons. His story begins with the victorious return of Theseus from the war, leading Hippolyta and Emilia with him. A suitable exordium is borrowed from Statius (*Theb.* xii. 519 ff.). The newly awakened interest of the reader is then immediately directed to the affairs of Thebes; and the principal persons, Palamon and Arcite, after whom Chaucer named his poem, very soon appear upon the scene.

Unfortunately, this is all we are able to say of the original form of the English version—only two small fragments of Chaucer's first strophic poem on *Palamon and Arcite* are extant. The whole poem exists in a later version in heroic couplets, which the poet incorporated, as the *Knight's Tale*, among his *Canterbury Tales*. Doubtless the poem was then condensed; much of it was probably cut off or retained only in passing hints. The tone and conception must also have been greatly modified; this, indeed, can be shown from two passages; and the poet's humor must have been brought much more into play. On the whole, we cannot go far wrong in considering *Palamon and Arcite* as a kind of middle point between the *Teseide* and the *Knight's Tale*, remembering, however, that the principal innovations contained in the present English version were already present in the lost poem.

Let us keep this in mind in the following consideration of the *Knight's Tale*.

Anyone turning from the *Teseide* to the *Knight's Tale* feels that he is turning from a world of impossibilities to a world, if not of realities, at least of inner truth. The discrepancy between form and contents, between modern sentiment and ancient costume, between antique and mediæval manners, between the tone of the classical epics and the love romances, appears suppressed. Chaucer's whole story breathes the atmosphere of a romantic tale; the whole action of all the participating personages belongs to a world which is composed indeed of very dif-



ferent elements—antique, Byzantine, mediæval—and which is in an educational and historical sense full of gross anachronisms, but which bears, nevertheless, a uniform poetic impress—viz., the impress of a fantastic period of the Renaissance. This uniformity lies in the soul of the poet, whose many-sided and somewhat checkered education is concentrated in a living interest for what is thoroughly human, and in an increasing perception of the beautiful. Unlike Boccaccio, Chaucer makes no pretensions whatever to the epic style; yet his narrative nevertheless breathes a potent epic charm, because he does no violence to his nature, but writes just as his interest is excited, and either tarries lovingly upon details or makes summary contractions, sometimes letting the story progress with energy, sometimes branching out loquaciously into reflections and amplifications.

The sentimental temperature of the internal action has been considerably lowered by Chaucer—his characters are more realistic, and in the way they express their feelings the poet's own sovereign humor is frequently revealed. In the conflict between friendship and love, he puts friendship entirely in the background; the love which seizes Palamon and Arcite with such violence, which dominates their entire being, separates them from their own past and strangely decides their fates; this love is Chaucer's proper theme; this he presents with keen participation, and at the same time with a roguish wink. His Palamon is much more passionate and jealous, much less magnanimous than the corresponding character in Boccaccio, and Arcite also becomes much more positive and violent in his hands. Chaucer even puts the following words in his mouth against Palamon (line 319 ff.):

“ We stryve, as dide the houndës for the boon,  
 They foughte al day, and yet hir part was noon :  
 There cam a kyte, whil that they were so wrothe,  
 And bar away the boon betwixt hem bothe.  
 And tharfore at the kyngës court, my brother,  
 Eche man for himself, ther is noon other.”

Chaucer succeeded, nevertheless, in bringing out with the utmost sharpness the contrast made by Boccaccio be-

tween the melancholy Arcite and the choleric Palamon ; but while Boccaccio openly prefers the first, placing him always in the foreground and making him much more interesting than his rival, Chaucer strives to be equally just to both, and is able by well-timed, happy little touches to show off their characters by contrasts, and to warm the heart of the reader for each. Certain motives which are, indeed, contained in the Italian poem—as, for example, the difference in the prayers offered by the two heroes before the tournament—are first worked out with their full effect by Chaucer.

Compared with her two lovers, Emilia is kept more in the background by Chaucer than by Boccaccio. But we see enough of this lovely figure—whose heart is first inflamed by the fight of the rivals, and who nevertheless does not know her own mind, but hesitates in uncertainty between the two till the last—to appreciate the love of Palamon and Arcite.

As we have already said, Chaucer relieved his Theseus of one part of his heroic rôle. We do not see him fighting against the Amazons for power and glory for his own sake ; the only fight in which we see him engaged is in the interests of humanity. He is thus so much the better suited for the impartial rôle assigned to him by Chaucer. This rôle is of a double nature—on the one side Theseus represents a sort of earthly Providence, on the other he is a sort of privileged exponent of Chaucer's humor and worldly wisdom. Nor does he stand on the conventional ideal dignity or in the narrow limits of his Italian prototype ; like an English knight of the fourteenth century, he can fly into a passion with great violence. But under a somewhat rude exterior he conceals an excellent heart and sturdy manhood, sound common sense and noble humanity. He shows exquisite humor in his reflections on the fierce duel of Palamon and Arcite :

Behold for Goddës sake that sitteth above,  
See how they bleed ! be they not well arrayed ?  
Thus hath their lord, the god of love, them paid  
Their wages, and their fees for their service.  
And yet they weenen for to be full wise,  
That serven love, for aught that may befall.

And yet is this the bestē game of all,  
 That she for whom they have this jollity  
 Can them therefore as muchel thank as me.  
 She wot no more of all this hotē fare,  
 By God, than wot a cuckoo or an hare.  
 But all must be assayed hot or cold;  
 A man must be a fool either young or old.\*

The creations of even the most objective poets do not belie their family resemblance and parentage. Shakspeare's characters, with the exception of the typical clowns,—and these, also, in their way,—are all clever; and most of Chaucer's personages are inclined to philosophical reflections, in which they like to mix up scholastic arguments and learned quotations with popular phrases and old proverbs. In the *Knight's Tale* not only do Theseus and his father Ægeus philosophize in this way, but also the two lovers, and perhaps in a way not always adapted to their situation and rank. But we must not fail to mention here that, in this respect, the poet knows how to draw the light and shade, and in such things his works show a decided progress toward a greater truthfulness of characterization.

Chaucer has bestowed a great amount of care on certain descriptive portions of his poem. This is specially true of the delineation of the amphitheater built by Theseus for the tournament, with its three temples for Mars, Venus, and Diana; on this occasion the English poet differs from his predecessor in a remarkable way. The description of the three temples and the pictures or statues therein contained shows us on the one hand excellent models of characteristic amplification, and on the other hand passages which betray the influence of the Renaissance in its growing taste for plastic beauty.

The description of the tournament is given in a more general—we might almost say, in a sort of typical—style, but is nevertheless extremely vivid.

But most exquisite is the manner in which Chaucer compensates us for what was missing in his poem, viz., the enumeration and description of the heroes going to the tournament at Athens. Instead of the long and un-

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\* Tyrwhitt, *Cant. Tales*, 1802-1814; *Knight's Tale*, 942 ff.

attractive catalogue which occupies nearly the whole of the sixth book of the *Teseide*, he gives us, as it were for a symbolical characterization of both parties, two carefully executed portraits ornamented with romantic and even fabulous magnificence. Attention has been often called to the beauty of these delineations. Yet the main point seems to have been overlooked, viz., the inner relation between the appearance of King Lycurgus of Thrace and the character of Palamon, and between the character of Emetreus of India and Arcite. The appearance of Lycurgus is manly, imposing, even terrible; Emetreus unites the charm of youthful beauty with a lion-like glance and a voice of thunder.

And so everywhere there is seen a great delicacy of meaning, a conscious art, which is only fully revealed by a continued study, for it delights to hide itself under a certain gayety of tone, and in a simple though always vivid and significant diction.

By supplying so much of his own, Chaucer unavoidably sacrificed many of the beauties of his original. Whoever wishes to study Boccaccio's amiable manner, even in his imperfect creations, must read the original. But whoever wishes above all things for æsthetic pleasure, and yet still prefers the *Teseide* to the *Knight's Tale* after one or even several readings, deserves greater praise for his patience than for his literary taste.

## VII.

When Edward III. followed the Black Prince, and closed his eyes forever in 1377, June 21, a patriotic popular poet, whose style reminds us of Laurence Minot in more ways than one, sang :\* "Good gentlemen, look on your warlike king, who has died full of days, and on his son, Prince Edward, who was the source of all courage; we shall not again receive on earth two such men of noble mold. . . ." King Edward had outlived his fame and glory by many years. His death, however, brought back freshly to people's memory the time of his

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\* Political Poems and Songs, edited by Th. Wright, i. 218.



famous victories of Crécy and Poitiers, and produced a feeling that a great epoch was about to close. The new government was regarded not without dread; yet there was a flattering hope that the eleven-year-old king, the son of the Black Prince, would, at least in maturer years, continue gloriously the work of his father and grandfather. "The stem is from the same root," sang that patriotic popular poet, "a twig begins to grow, who, I hope, will yet be our salvation, and who will bring his enemies into his power and rule from the throne as a master."\*

These hopes were destined to remain unfulfilled. Only in the ideal domain of English poetry did the reign of Richard II. put forth a splendor by which all previous reigns were cast far into the shade.

The poet from whom this splendor emanated experienced personally little change from the change of kings. The favor of the court was, in the meantime, continued to him undiminished by the new ruler also. In the first years of the new reign he was twice employed on important diplomatic missions; on the second of these missions, between the end of May, 1378, and the beginning of February, 1379, he was sent again to Italy, on this occasion to Lombardy, and for a longer period. Financially his position was as good as before; indeed in a short time it became decidedly better. This was undoubtedly due to the continued powerful influence of the Duke of Lancaster. John of Gaunt remained a faithful patron of the poet, and also showed many kindnesses, with frequent New Year's presents, to his wife Philippa Chaucer, who was still a lady of honor to his duchess, Queen Constance.

At this period the influence of the duke was also much greater than formerly on the inner life of the poet—on his poetic productions. In the first place, Chaucer allowed himself to be influenced by his patron in the choice of subjects. It is clear that such an influence as this must have been of the greatest importance for the whole tendency of his poetry.

The nature of the sway exercised by John of Gaunt is pretty plainly seen throughout the *Compleynt of Mars*, an

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\* Political Poems and Songs, ed. Th. Wright.



“occasional poem” of very peculiar character, which Chaucer wrote at his request. It refers to incidents which seem to have taken place\* in the spring of 1379, viz.: an episode in the chronicle of scandals at the English court of that time.

As may be imagined, the subject of the poem is presented in an allegorical disguise. The veil, indeed, is not exactly transparent; but the initiated must undoubtedly have known who was meant by Mars, and who by Venus. According to the tradition established in the reign of Henry VI. by a disciple and copier of Chaucer, Mars represented John Holland, third son of Thomas, Earl of Kent, afterwards Earl of Huntingdon and Duke of Exeter; and the Venus of the poem was Isabella, Countess of Edmund, Earl of Cambridge, who was made Duke of York in 1386. John of Gaunt was doubly related to this Venus—Isabella,† who is reported by a chronicler as being “*mulier mollis et delicata*,” and towards the close of her life “*satis pœnitens et conversa*.” She was the younger sister of his wife, Constance of Castile, and her husband Edmund was his own younger brother. Mars (Holland) also came after a time into family relationship with Chaucer’s patron, by marrying Elizabeth, the divorced Countess of Pembroke, who was a daughter of Blanche and John of Gaunt. The whole atmosphere in this affair is not at all refreshing. John of Gaunt may have followed, with a malicious pleasure, the progress of the adulterous connection between John Holland and the Countess of Cambridge; and when at length a kind of catastrophe supervened, he shook with laughter, and Chaucer had to write out the story for him in flowing rhymes.

In order to escape the growing suspicion and to enjoy each other with less disturbance, it appears the enamored couple had agreed upon a short separation, with a subsequent assignation at a remote castle belonging to the absent Earl of Cambridge. John Holland went there first; Isabella soon followed, by a circuitous route, but in

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\* See Appendix.

† Walsingham, year 1396.

a great hurry. The joy of their reunion was sweet, but of short duration. Accident or ill design suddenly brought visitors to the castle—possibly the king with his suite. Isabella had to flee with all haste ; she found a secret hiding-place, where she remained in much anxiety and fear of discovery till a confidential friend came to her aid and brought her comfort and encouragement. And her paramour, placed in an awkward position, and prevented by circumstances from again approaching her, was inconsolable about the separation and also about the condition of his beloved.

It is not absolutely certain that the above outline is correct in every point. Possibly we should consider the situation as abstract rather than local and concrete ; there may have been obstacles to close intercourse, rather than intervening distance ; instead of surprise in a castle, there may have been merely a threatened discovery of their love affairs, and a consequent constraint to suspend for a time their intimacy. But the affair, as it actually happened, was certainly not wanting in many realistic and pungent touches.

The allegory in which Chaucer clothed it is very remarkable from the close connection of mythological and astronomical ideas. The difficult duty of harmonizing the two groups with each other, and at the same time with the main incidents of the actual occurrence, has been most happily carried out, as indeed it could only have been done by a poet of his discernment and an astronomer of his ability. The long complaint of Mars, to which the story leads up, is in some points, evidently with intention, made heavy and pedantic. The reader of to-day does not perceive its full effect. On the other hand the proem to the whole is very pretty:

“ Gladeth, ye lovers, on the morowe gray !

Loo, Venus, rysen amonge yon rowes rede .

And floures fresshe, honouren ye this day,

For when the sunne upriste then wol ye sprede !

But ye lovers, that lye in eny drede,

Fleeth, lest wickked tongues you espye !

Loo yonde the sunne, the candel of jalosye !

“ Wyth teres blew, and with a wounded hert,  
 Taketh your leve, and Seynt John to borowe,  
 Apeseth sumwhat of your sorowes smert,  
 Tyme cometh efte that cese shal your sorowe.  
 The glad nyght ys worthe an hevy morowe !  
 Seynt Valentyne, a foule thus herd I synge  
 Upon your day, er sunne gan up sprynge.

“ Yet sange this foule, I rede yow al a-wake,  
 And ye that han not chosen in humble wyse,  
 Yet at this fest renoveleth your servyse,  
 With-out repentyng cheseth ye your make ;  
 And ye that han ful chosen as I devise,  
 Confermeth hyt perpetuely to dure  
 And paciently taketh your aventure.

“ And for the worship of this highe fest,  
 Yet wol I, in my briddes wise, synge  
 The sentence of the compleynt at the lest  
 That woful Mars made atte departyng  
 Fro fresshe Venus, in a morwenyng  
 Whan Phebus, with his firy torches rede,  
 Ransaked hath every lover in hys drede.”

Then followed the *Tale*, and finally the *Complaint*. What the birds were twittering must have been somewhat of an open secret.

At this period Chaucer must have been for some time occupied with a greater enterprise, to which probably the Duke of Lancaster had again incited him : \* viz., the composition of the famous *Romance of the Rose*.

The high-born man of the world was evidently a patron of art, as such gentlemen commonly are ; but poetry can only have an interest for them when it contains something of *haut goût* in addition to the purely artistic effect. To see strong realistic views of society penetrating through the ideal beauty of a purified poetic form, to hear somewhat frivolous ideas of love, and very cynical conceptions of virtue and truth in women, proclaimed in harmonious verses—this must indeed have tickled the duke, skeptical and pessimist as he was from his varied experience. But the poet himself had grown up in the same atmosphere as his patron, and may in part have

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\* See Appendix.

passed through the same experiences. He, too, was by nature a man of the world and endowed with a goodly share of realism. With his objectivity and many-sidedness, with the naïve humor which characterizes him, we can readily imagine that he did not object to follow out the hints and wishes expressed to him, nay, that he even met them half-way. Chaucer could, in these matters, take more liberties than many another poet; for his kindly toleration and his benevolent humor, as they were more and more strongly developed, enabled him to blunt the sharpest edges, and protected him against those dangers with which the development of every genius of a merely negative disposition is threatened. At any rate, the stage to which the *Life of Saint Cecilia* owed its existence lay now far behind the poet. Since the historian is compelled to state all, we cannot in this connection pass over his abduction of a lady named Cecilia Chaumpayne, for which Chaucer was at this time judicially prosecuted. The mildest possible conception of this ugly circumstance is suggested by the behavior of the lady whom he carried off, for she, in the proceedings of the court, on May 1, 1380, declined on her part to prosecute the defendant.

That Chaucer's version of the *Romance of the Rose* was begun during the period which now occupies us follows necessarily from the connection in which the poet himself mentions this work.\* And thus every possibility of seeing, in the Glasgow fragment of a *Romaunt of the Rose*, a portion of Chaucer's work, disappears—even if the evident differences in the language could be explained away. We are compelled to admit the disagreeable fact that Chaucer's imitation of the famous French poem is lost to us. Of the numerous losses which we mourn in mediæval English literature, this is one of those which cause us the most pain. At the stage of development which the poet had attained at this time, he must have translated this peculiar work in a manner peculiarly his own. We may assume that he softened if not eliminated the incongruity in treatment and tone existing between the two parts; that he perhaps imparted to Guillaume

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\* See Appendix.

de Lorris's poem some of the biting satire of his successor, and that he certainly condensed and poetically enriched the poem of Jean de Meung, and rendered it closer to the style of his predecessor.

Shortly after the *Romance of the Rose* Chaucer probably translated, but in prose, Boëthius's work on the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Though from the present standpoint of criticism the two works seem separated by a broad and deep chasm, this is in a manner filled up when we try to imagine ourselves in mediæval conditions, and to recollect the course of the English poet's education. It is probable that Chaucer had become acquainted with many ideas and passages of the *Consolatio Philosophiæ* from Jean de Meung's poem, even before he studied Boëthius's work itself. From the moment that his philosophical interests were more strongly aroused, he never lost sight of Boëthius. In the *Knight's Tale* many passages are found directly traceable to that author, and it is scarcely probable that all of these were introduced at the revision of the *Epic of Palamon and Arcite*. It is possible that the translation of Boëthius occupied Chaucer for several years, with more or less prolonged interruptions; the greater part as well as the completion of the work may be placed, at the earliest, about the year 1381.

This version is complete, and faithful in all essential points. Chaucer had no other purpose than to disclose, if possible wholly, the meaning of this famous work to his contemporaries, and notwithstanding many errors in single points\* he has fairly well succeeded in reproducing the sense of the original. He often employs for this purpose periphrastic turns, and for the explanation of difficult passages, poetical figures, mythological and historical allusions, and he even incorporates a number of notes in his text. His version thus becomes somewhat diffuse, and, in the undeveloped state of prose composition so characteristic of that age, often quite

\* As an instance of misconception, of which there are many, the following may serve: Orig. II, m. 4 "Fugiens periculosam Sortem sedis amœnæ, Humili domum memento Certus figere saxo."—Chaucer, Boet. ed. R. Morris, 1162: "and forþi yif þou wolt flee þe perilous adventure, þat is to seiue of þe worlde, have mynde certeynly to ficchyn þi house of a myrie site in a lowe stoon."



unwieldy. But there is no lack of warmth, and even of a certain coloring. As an illustration we here properly select the translation of a metrical portion, since the poetical parts offer the interpreter the best opportunity for showing his skill :

“Who so þat þe covertures of her veyn apparailes myȝte strepen of þise proude kynges, þat þou seest sitten on heyȝe in her chayeres, glyteryng in shynyng purpre, envyroned wip sorweful armures, manasyng wip cruel mouȝe, blowyng by woodnesse of herte,—he sholde se þan þat thilke lordes beren wipinne hir corages ful streyte cheynes. For leccherye tormentip hem on þat oon syde wip gredy venyms, and troublable Ire, þat ariseþ in hem þe floodes of troubynges, tourmentip upon þat oper side hir þouȝt, or sorwe halt hem wery or ycauȝt, or slidyng and disseyving hope tourmentip hem. And þefore syn þou seest [o] on heed—þat is to seyne oon tyraunt—bere so many tyrauntis, þan ne doþ pilk [e] tyraunt nat þat he desirip, syn he is cast doune wip so many wicked lordes—þat is to seyn wip so many vices, þat han so wicked lordshipes over hym.”\*

The language of the Boëthius translation shows many a peculiarity ; viz., numerous Latinisms, and even Roman idioms in synthesis, inflection, or syntax, which are either wholly absent or at least found very rarely in Chaucer’s poems. The labor of this translation proved a school for the poet, from which his powers of speech came forth

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\* Ed. Morris, 336r-337r. Comp. Orig IV. met. 2 ;

Quos vides sedere celso  
Solii culmine reges,  
Purpura claros nitente,  
Septos tristibus armis,  
Ore torvo comminantes,  
Rabie cordis anhelos ;  
Detrahat si quis superbis  
Vani tegmina cultus,  
Iam videbit intus arctas  
Dominos ferre catenas.  
Hinc enim libido versat  
Avidis corda venenis,  
Hinc flagellat ira mentem  
Fluctus turbida tollens,  
Moeror aut captos fatigat,  
Aut spes lubrica torquet.  
Ergo, cum caput tot unum  
Cernas ferre tyrannos,  
Non facit, quod optat, ipse  
Dominus pressus iniquis.

not only more elevated but more self-reliant, and above all with a greater aptitude to express thoughts of a deeper nature.

This, in itself, presupposes more profound thinking; and, without doubt, this was one, and even the most important, consequence of this labor. It was only by means of the laborious attempts at reproduction that the often re-read work of the Roman philosopher passed wholly into the mental possession of Chaucer. Hence we see in the poet's views of the world, as expressed sometimes at greater length, and at other times in shorter passages, how the ideas, conceptions, and problems contained in the *Consolatio Philosophiæ*, play a more and more important part.

In the same way as Boëthius, Chaucer conceives the relation between Providence and Fate (Fortuna), and he pictures the image of this goddess in her fickleness, indifference, and malicious cruelty, quite after the manner of Boëthius. Following closely in the footsteps of his teacher, he reflects upon the narrowness of the fate of mortals, upon the inconstancy of earthly happiness, the ignorance of man in relation to things that tend to his own good. A deep impression was made upon him by the old and beautiful theory which asserts that it is Love which holds the links together in the great chain of things, and which guides earth and ocean, and commands the heavens. For a long time he is occupied with the insoluble problem how a divine foreknowledge and the freedom of the human will can coexist.

As may be easily understood, the poet does not succeed in establishing a system. Perhaps he was not able even to follow Boëthius's line of thought in every particular. At any rate, the solution of many an *aporia*, as attempted by the idealistic thinker after well-known precedents, does not seem to have been quite clear to the realist. In his poetry he uses now one side, and then again the other of the antinomies with which he is occupied; occasionally, however, he allows the idea of necessity, of fate, to come out very forcibly.

But in Chaucer's poetical style the influence of Boëthius, even aside from the wealth of thought and increased in-

clination towards philosophic argumentation, is perceptible. Many a simile, figure of speech, and in general the definite form in which certain thoughts appear, has been borrowed by the poet from his author. We shall even see how the idea of particular scenes and situations has assumed a more definite shape from the work on the *Consolation of Philosophy*.

It is natural, in considering Chaucer's *Boëthius*, to call to mind the similar work of King Alfred. But such a retrospect vividly reminds us of the very slight progress English prose has made from the ninth to the fourteenth century, of the manifold causes which, at various times, put a stop to a development fairly inaugurated, and bequeathed the task of beginning anew to another generation. So much the higher should we estimate the services of the great poet who, the first since the Norman Conquest, enriched the national prose with a philosophic work.

A few years later the first comprehensive historical work in English prose was completed. This also originated in the southern part of the country, only more to the westward. Its composer, John Trevisa, was born in Cornwall, and was then living in Gloucestershire as vicar of Berkeley and chaplain of Thomas, fourth Earl of Berkeley. Deep learning and acumen do not appear so much in Trevisa as good intentions and tireless industry. He came to be the most productive and many-sided translator of his time; yet in reality his efforts imply only an enlargement of material and no internal growth of English prose. Still, this enlargement was of great importance at this period. Like Wyclif, Trevisa had pursued his studies at Oxford, and had somewhat imbibed the spirit stirring at that university. A translation from his pen has come down to us of that dialogue between *Knight* and *Cleric* in which William of Occam had expressed his bold ideas of the relation between clerical and secular authority. He also translated the short sermon in which Richard of Armagh had attacked the mendicant monks at Oxford in 1357. A more neutral tinge is shown in his revision of theological and philosophical works, such as that ascribed to the bishop

and martyr Methodius on the *Beginning and End of the World*, or of Bartholomew de Glanvilla's book *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, which Trevisa completed in the year 1398. His principal work, the translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon*, belongs to an earlier period. The author of this chronicle had been a monk in the Abbey of St. Werburg at Chester, and had died there at a ripe old age about a quarter of a century previously. A man of extensive book knowledge, Higden had collected the widely scattered material for his historical work from the most diversified authors of antiquity, and especially of the Middle Ages. In seven books, a number corresponding to the seven days of creation, he gives, first, a geographic-antiquarian review of the known world, and next, a sketch of universal history, which, from the fourth book onwards, has its centre of attraction in English history, and comes down to the time of Edward III. The industry expended by Higden on this comprehensive book did not remain unrewarded, and the lack of criticism which his work shows did not diminish the recognition with which it was received. His *Chronicle of the World* became, at least in England, one of the most widely read works of the expiring Middle Ages. Next to the encyclopedical character of the composition, this may have been largely caused by the numerous and often grotesque fables with which it was interlarded. Trevisa undertook the translation of this work under the auspices of Lord Berkeley, who occupies a similar position in the inauguration of English secular prose as do other members of the nobility of West-England in the revival of the alliterative poetry. The work was completed April 18, 1387, and dedicated to the noble patron, whose relationship to the work and its translator is expressed in the preface in a dialogue between a *Lord* and a *Clerk*. Trevisa's translation is very faithful, except where his ignorance, as frequently happened, caused misunderstandings and mistakes. He added but little of his own to the original; but he carried on the thread of the historical review for a few years in the form of a concise Latin sequel, and ended at the treaty of Bretigny in 1360.

The appearance of works like Trevisa's *Polychronicon*, Chaucer's *Boëthius*, Wyclif's pamphlets and above all his translation of the Bible, shows that a new era is about to dawn for English prose—especially since the last quarter of the fourteenth century.

### VIII.

The time, however, was yet far distant when prose writing should succeed in expelling poetry from realms of composition which did not belong to it, and should occupy a position equal to that of poetry. The progress made by prose faded into insignificance when compared with the powerful flight taken by poetry within the same period. Chaucer continued to conquer still new domains for poetry, and, in doing this, to elevate "the dignity of the art as well as the dignity of the artist."

At the beginning of 1382 the English court and the whole country experienced a great and joyful emotion. On January 14, King Richard II., now fifteen years old, was betrothed to the Princess Anne of Bohemia, only a few months older than himself; she was daughter of the Emperor Charles IV. of Germany, and sister of King Wenceslaus. Festivity followed festivity, and many a lance was broken in the tournaments between English and Bohemian knights, in honor of the young couple; it seemed as if the jubilations would never cease. It had been no easy task to English diplomacy to bring about this alliance; the princess had been wooed by many a suitor and had even been twice engaged to German princes; the negotiations had been going on for more than a year. Now that success had crowned these efforts, the retrospect of the prolonged period of wooing imparted a greater relish to the joy of the present. Here was an inviting theme for the writer of "occasional poems." The wedding festivities continued till the 8th of February, and soon after they had passed came St. Valentine's Day, which, according to ancient custom, offered an opportunity for good-natured fun and pleasant



allusions. This was an occasion which the court poet might turn to good account. Chaucer did not let it slip; nor did he fail at the right moment to take advantage of the splendid opening thus offered to his genius. In honor of the newly married couple, and as a mark of tender homage to the young Queen, he wrote his *Parlement of Foules*, one of the most lovely poems that ever came from his pen.

As in the Book of the Duchess, he resorts to the then common practice and describes a vision where he sees an allegorical action taking place. In both poems the vision is introduced in much the same way. In the *Parlement of Foules*, too, the original idea is suggested by a famous book of which the poet mentions the contents. This time it is not Ovid, but the *Somnium Scipionis* of Cicero, the episode selected being that charming and important portion of his work on *The State*—a portion which had been saved for the Middle Ages by the zeal of the commentator Macrobius from a work then lost, but partly brought to light again in more modern times. The dream of Scipio Africanus the Younger, who is carried up to heaven by his older namesake, and there listens to the harmony of the spheres and obtains important information as to the fate of man after death, exercised a decided influence on the development of the mediæval poetry of visions, and even made itself directly felt in the *Divine Comedy* of Dante. In Chaucer we see more than once the effect of Cicero's book interblending with the influence of Dante or even of Boëthius.

The poet is reading in this work one evening with the greatest interest until bedtime; wearied with his close attention he falls into a dream; the elder Africanus now comes up before his eyes and leads him forth, just as Virgil conducts Dante in the *Divine Comedy*. As a reward for his diligent study he invites the poet with him to a beautiful park surrounded by a wall of green stone. The gate bears upon each wing an inscription, very similar to Dante's famous verses on the gates of hell, and applied here to the realm of love; here they invite to enter, whereas there they frighten back and cast the poet into anxious doubt. Encouraged by Africanus, who

good-naturedly forces him in, the poet finds himself transported into a kind of paradise. Magnificent trees of the most varied kinds, glorious with imperishable verdure, delightful gardens abounding with all sorts of animals and flowers, spread around him, while the most delicious music fills the air. Here they behold the temple of Venus, whose son Cupid is seen in the open air, hammering and sharpening his arrows. After a series of allegorical figures we perceive the goddess herself, reclining on a golden couch within the temple, her golden hair unbound and kept together only by a thread of gold ; she is bare from head to breast, and is otherwise only clad in a transparent veil. Bacchus and Ceres sit by her side ; and at her feet lie a young couple imploring her aid. Around the temple walls hangs many a broken bow, once the possession of such virgins as had spent their days in Diana's service. And everywhere are paintings, some representing the history of women like Kallisto and Atalanta, others the fate of Semiramis, Candace, Hercules, Tristan, Dido, Troilus, and many more.

The poet leaves the temple and steps out again into the open air and flowery meadows. There he sees a queen whose beauty overshadows every other, even as the light of the sun outshines the stars. It is the goddess Nature, enthroned upon a hill of flowers. Birds of every kind are flocking round her, and in such numbers that the air and the earth, the water and the trees are covered and filled, so that the poet scarce can find a spot whereon to stand. It is St. Valentine's Day, the day when every bird selects its mate. At the command of the goddess the birds of every sort take their accustomed places. Dame Nature holds a female eagle on her hand, so distinguished for its beauty, goodness, and virtue that the high goddess herself is in raptures over her own work. She opens the assembly, and after ancient law and custom calls upon the worthiest to make the first selection. The worthiest is the kingly eagle, wise and brave and resolute, and true as steel, whom in every limb she has shaped conformably to her ideal. It soon appears that the kingly bird and two other eagles of lower rank desire with equal passion the glorious female

bird. The wooing of these three rivals lasts from morn till night. The other birds are trembling with impatience, and raise a noise that threatens to disrupt the forest. Many members of the vast assembly volunteer, or are called upon, to proffer their opinion as to how the strife should be appeased. The most varied assertions twang through the air in speeches and retorts, or are interrupted by peculiar natural sounds. The presiding goddess terminates at length the tumultuous debate by calling upon the much desired Beauty to choose for herself, but at the same time attempting to guide her choice to the kingly eagle as the worthiest suitor. But the timorous eagle Beauty, wishing for the present to avoid the worship of Venus and Amor, implores to be allowed a year's delay, to test her own feelings in the case. This request is granted, and the three suitors are advised to bide their time in hopefulness, and to show themselves worthy in the service of the Beauty. Then the other birds are mated, and having thus attained the object of their wishes, break out into loud jubilations. Chosen songsters sing a rondeau in the French fashion; the assembly then adjourns with cheers. The poet awakes—to devote himself to other books.

Our dry sketch will have imparted only to those who know the poem a little of the impression it produces. The whole is a picture of the most charming beauty, full of life and true to nature, exquisitely toned down in conception and coloring, and in its climax—viz., in the debate of the birds—it is full of dramatic movement and enhanced with the richest humor. Chaucer is here thoroughly himself; the subject treated is comparatively insignificant; but he does it the fullest justice. What does it matter if the description of the park and the temple of Venus has been largely translated from Boccaccio;\* or if the image of nature and some characteristic traits in the various kinds of birds have been taken from a mediæval Latin author,† or if other points remind us of Dante? The life that animates all this little world has been

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\* La Teseide, xi. verses 22-24; vii. verses 51-66.

† The work of Alanus ab Insulis (the author of Anticlaudianus), *De Planctu Naturæ*, a book written in mixed prose and verse.

breathed into it by Chaucer, who was himself a pupil of the great teacher Nature, the "Vicar of Almighty God"; and from the stage where he now stands he might call out to every depreciator of his talents: *Je prends mon bien où je le trouve*.\*

In the *Parlement of Foules* Chaucer's feeling for Nature comes to full expression; his genius for characterization and his humor appear in a new light. His language and stanzas roll on in their richest cadences. The poem is conceived and carried out with the most exquisite taste. Abundance and moderation are made to keep each other in equal balance with extraordinary tact. We feel as if the noble womanly character of the young queen, whose goodness of heart and rich mental accomplishments were equally admired by contemporaries, had exercised a beneficent influence on the poet.

The influence of John of Gaunt, as we have already seen, formed in many respects a sharp contrast to that of the queen. But the duke did good service to English poetry by inducing Chaucer to depict the joys and sorrows of Troilus,† or if this is saying too much—at least by inciting and encouraging him.

The story of the mediæval *Tale of Troy* has been followed in our first volume (p. 168, English version) down to Benoit de Sainte More, the originator of the episode of Troilus. His *Romance of Troy* was the production of a man of amiable talents, who in his excellences and defects somewhat resembles Boccaccio, though with less depth and less education, and was the starting-point for the further growth of the legend and the direct or subsidiary source of almost all the stories which naturally belong to this cycle.

The *Historia Trojana* of Judge Guido de Columna (of Messina?) is the only one of these stories that attained a widespread and long-enduring reputation. This *Historia* was finished in 1287, or fully a century

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\* It sounds a little more modest in his own words (*Parl. of Foules*, 22 ff.):

"For ofte of olde feeldes, as men seyth,  
Cometh al this newe corn from yeer to yere,  
And out of olde bookes, in good feyth,  
Cometh al this newe science that men lere."

† See Appendix.



after its French original ; it is the work of a distorted brain, of limited and confused learning, and full of fantastic crochets ; this strange book reproduced Benoit's poem, but lost in charm as much as it gained in common intelligibility and authority. The vividness and pure flow of the old French has given place to a wretched, turgid Latin, the naïve babbling poetry to an affected, long-legged, rambling prose. The material contents, with a few variations, are the same in both. But the story has experienced a very dubious enrichment in long-spun scholastic speeches and dialogues, in moralizing excursions, and in attacks upon women ; and the whole display of geographical, historical, and mythological learning made by the translator has, upon the whole, notwithstanding some few corrections, only resulted in a vast increase of confusion in dates, places, persons, and in the spelling of names. Far-fetched classical allusions, Virgilian phrases, and quotations from Ovid, only deepen the impression of the motley diversity of the unfinished confusion, however much these may have recommended the book to the taste of the dawning Renaissance, which was as yet but little enlightened.

Boccaccio seems to have known both Guido and Benoit ; Italian translations of both were then in existence ; and on their basis he built up one of his most charming works, the most perfect of his epic poems. On this occasion he was in a much more favorable position for treating his subject than afterwards when he wrote his *Teseide* ; he judged more correctly what this subject required of him and what he himself was capable of doing. Here again it was a personal want, a kindly sympathy, which led him to take up the story. But this time he had not first to create the story and bring it into its epic bearings ; it lay before him finished, as part of a richly organized whole, and his only creative work was that specially suited to the poet, viz., the exercise of selection, of spiritual penetration, of deepening the characterization, and of glorifying all by a poetic presentation. It appears the desire had not yet come to him of singing arms and battles ; epic pretensions lay quite as far from him now, where he could have made them tell without violence to his subject, as when afterwards



he tried violently to satisfy them at the cost of his subject and with injury to the effect. He might well shun the hardihood of challenging a rivalry in an epic of Troy with Homer—even though he then knew the latter only by name. His artistic instincts directed him on the same way to which he was urged by the interests of his heart.

Troy and the besieging army of the Greeks, the fights and fates of the heroes, the vicissitudes of the war, form for Boccaccio merely the necessary background where the love story of Troilus and "Griseida" \* (changed from Briseida) begins. The whole interest is directed to the development of this story ; on it is concentrated the whole force of the poet's presentation. The fight may rage without before the walls, Hector or Ajax may acquire glory, Trojans or Greeks may gain the victory—of such things we only hear so much as the economy of the love romance requires. We are occupied with the sudden commencement and violent growth of Troilus's passion ; we almost participate while listening to his sighing and complaints ; we follow with excitement the progress of the intrigue by which Griseida is made aware of his passion and begins to show some interest in the youthful prince, up till the moment when his supplication is granted. After a short period of the ineffable delight of love, the necessity of separation breaks in on Troilus like an iron destiny ; despairing pain and terrible imaginings, gloomy resignation and hope for brighter days, reign alternate in his breast ; after the separation a new violent outbreak of his feelings, then a period of deep sorrow and ever restless longing ; his ill forebodings assume more definite form, they are fed by a prophetic dream and justified by facts ; after a short flutter, hope begins to die. An accident brings the certainty of the unfaithfulness of the beloved. He has now only one interest in living—to be revenged on the seducer. Full of wild passion, he fights in the battles against the Greeks ; his feats of arms cover him with fame and fill his foes with fear. But in the battle he seeks only Diomedes, only the satisfaction of

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\* Or "Cryseida," *i. e.*, the "Golden." Compare Homer's Chryseis, who is the daughter of Apollo's priest Chryses, while Griseida is daughter of Kalchas.

his burning thirst for vengeance. And before that thirst is quenched, death overtakes him from Achilles's hand.

This tender, sentimental tale (for the poet passes quickly over the conclusion, and all the warlike scenes) is presented by Boccaccio with great psychological discernment, and with the most personal participation, though here and there with a slight tinge of irony. A truly creative spirit is revealed by the way in which the details are worked out, and by the thousand little touches which make us interested in his characters. But all these touches converge to one point, all have the same tendency. Boccaccio could easily have interblended with his story a chivalrous and warlike element, without destroying the necessary unity of interest. How easy would it have been to introduce motives giving to the action a richer variety and to the chief characters an opportunity to show themselves from new points of view! But the poet has rejected this. He here takes the idea of the unity of action in such a rigorous—we might almost say, in such a narrow—sense, as scarcely ever appears to have been realized even in the classic dramas of the French. The characters reveal only those sides of their nature which have a necessary relation to the action; the action contains only such traits as emanate by a certain logical necessity from the subject brought into its simplest form. The widowhood of Griseida seems the only trait foreign to the idea of the story, and was called forth by the concrete, personal relations which the poet had in his mind. The title, however, which Boccaccio gives to the poem is highly characteristic of the whole nature of his work, and is as much in keeping with the narrow unity of the piece as it would be contradictory to the conception of broadness inseparable from an epic; by a strange, hybrid combination of words he names his poem *FILOSTRATO*, meaning "He who is struck to the ground by love."

In this so-called epic, as in French tragedies, the "confidant" is not wanting; here, indeed, he is a confidant who plays a much more important rôle than is commonly allotted to such personages. For the character created by Boccaccio for Pandarus, the faithful friend of Troilus, the cousin of Griseida—not only fulfills the

object of varying the monologue by dialogue ; he also enters effectively into the progress of the action. By his advice and consolation he exercises a decisive influence on Troilus's feelings ; his assistance smooths the way to the desired goal. He is the real manager of the intrigue up to the climax of the action ; when the peripeteia begins, his wisdom leaves even him in the lurch.

Notwithstanding these elements, which remind us of the technics of the drama, Boccaccio did not, however, carry out his plan in dramatic style. What lends the poetic charm to his love romance, and a certain nobility to his portrayal of ambiguous situations, is the lyrical enthusiasm which the poet contrived to diffuse over the entire work. The warmth of feeling with which he himself was filled gives life and color to his fine psychological delineations.

Boccaccio has created a thoroughly original and highly significant work from an episode in the Troy legend. But Chaucer succeeded in the still more astonishing performance of re-creating the Italian's epic, without in any way essentially altering the story or moving the centre of interest, into a new and equally significant, perhaps a little less harmonious, but yet a deeper and richer poem.

The tragic element in Boccaccio's presentation seems to have attracted Chaucer most. The inclination to bring this element into greater prominence mainly determines the changed conception of the characters of the two lovers. In Boccaccio, Troilus is a somewhat weakly disposed young worldling, who has passed through the ordinary school of Amor. In Chaucer, he is of an equally weak disposition. But as the conception of young heroes of this stamp is generally formed in the German mind, so here, too, he is a kind of Hippolytus before the decisive moment when he perceives Cryseyde in the splendor of her beauty. Believing himself invulnerable to the tenderer passions, he amuses himself by mocking with sovereign humor the poor wretches who bear Amor's yoke. Then he is overtaken by his nemesis—with sudden violence he is smitten by the arrow of the god, who now pays him back for all the scorn he had previously heaped upon his servants. His whole being now seems changed ; his mental elasticity is broken. Hope

first inspires him again with new life, and the delight of love restores the young knight to his former vigor. But the sudden change of his fortunes, the pain of separation, the gnawing desire, the anxious fear, are almost more than his nature can endure. And when at last he learns that his beloved has turned out unfaithful, his first impulse is not the wish for vengeance, but the desire for death; and he seeks in battle for this delivering friend with not less ardor than for his deadly foe Diomedes.

The character of Griseida has changed more under Chaucer's hands than Troilus. As in Boccaccio, she is a widow, but this trait is brought much less into prominence than in the *Filostrato*. The English Cryseyde is more innocent, less experienced, less sensual, more modest, than her Italian prototype. What a multitude of agencies were needed to inflame her love for Troilus; what a concatenation of circumstances, what a display of trickery and intrigue, to bring her at last to his arms! We see the threads of the web in which she is entangled drawing ever closer around her; her fall appears to us excusable, indeed unavoidable. And if afterwards, after the separation, she does not resist the temptation of Diomedes—how is she accountable, if her mind is less true and deep than that of Troilus? how is she accountable, when that first fall robbed her of her moral stay? Only unwillingly, and with hesitation, does Chaucer tell of her unfaithfulness, as if he himself were not convinced of it, and only admitted the testimony of his authorities with reluctance. And he eagerly picks up points from Benoit's story which may tend to the exculpation of his heroine. She only gives her heart to Diomedes when touched with sympathy for the wounds he had received from Troilus; and her infidelity is immediately followed by repentance. She thus appears as the victim of Destiny, she, not less than Troilus; and the finger of Destiny is perceived by the poet at all the turning-points of his story. He does not go so far as to wish to deny the freedom of the human will; and yet the question, how it can exist along with the fixed and firmly locked concatenation of events and the omniscience of Providence is for him an insoluble riddle. He therefore makes his hero enunciate thoughts



—in that supreme moment, when he is under the weight of his sudden misfortune and forebodes still worse disasters in the future—which Boëthius himself uses in his prison. The reply of "Philosophy," which should explain the riddle and dispel the doubt, has not been given us. It is his tragic intensiveness that leads the poet into such depths, and makes him express ideas in sonorous verses, which agitated deeply the most eminent minds of the age—ideas which touch strongly on the doctrine of predestination, such as Wyclif conceived it in following Augustine and Bradwardine. Not unworthy of notice is this coincidence between the great poet at the height of his artistic maturity and the great reformer who was then in Lutterworth closing the great life-account of his thoughts and actions.

Fortune, "who executes the ordinances of Fate, and is the shepherdess placed by God over men," finds in Chaucer's poem an appropriate instrument in Pandarus. In this character the creative power of the poet is most strongly expressed. It is a work of such intellectual boldness and assurance as can only be found equaled in the productions of the greatest masters. The more innocent Cryseyde is, the more inexperienced and helpless Troilus is, the greater grows the rôle of him who brings them together. Pandarus is here properly adapted for a pimp, and his name has remained in language as a synonym for this word. He is an elderly gentleman with great experience of life, uncle to Cryseyde, not—as in Boccaccio—her cousin. It is the poet's intention to excuse, or at least to explain, the part he plays, by the intimate friendship between him and Troilus. How far one can go out of friendship—especially to high personages—in the domain of moral concessions, how hard it is to make a halt at the right point, Chaucer himself had probably found out well enough in his relations with John of Gaunt. He presents the matter in the most objective form, but yet in such a way that the æsthetic charm given to the character of Pandarus helps us over the impression of the offense to morality in the same way as in Shakspeare's Falstaff. To the insipid and somewhat cynical views of an old worldling, Pandarus unites a good



dose of *naïveté*. And Chaucer makes him push his trade of pimp as naïvely as possible. When he sees Troilus, formerly the chivalrous and lusty youth, physically and morally sinking under the weight of an unexplained disease, and going actually to ruin, he feels for him the sincerest sympathy. And when, by close interrogation, he finds at length the cause of his disease, when he knows that it is solely his hopeless love for Cryseyde which is killing him, then he feels comforted and his decision is immediately made. In his opinion the whole business is not worth so much bother; but a man's mind is his kingdom; this man can be helped, and Pandarus is firmly determined to help him. Then he commences his work, and carries it triumphantly through with the greatest mastery. He has the necessary talents and the necessary liking for the play of intrigue, and knows well how to hide his roguishness under the mask of a somewhat rough good nature and a paternal recklessness.

These qualities unite excellently with the other traits lent to him by the poet. A strange combination of Polonius, Mercutio, and Sancho Panza, he is garrulous, rather vain of his homespun wisdom, but at the same time gifted richly with sound common sense and wit—he is a thoroughly humorous figure. And thus he answers the arrangement of the poem from every point of view. He is the lever that keeps the action in movement up to the climax; 'tis he who ties the tragic knot, and also he who brings the comic element into the tragedy. His practical views of life are everywhere opposed to the enthusiasm of Troilus, just as Sancho Panza forms the contrast to Don Quixote, and Jean de Meung to Guillaume de Lorris; they help us pleasantly over the onesidedness of an idealism which ignores the world, and free us from the oppressive feeling with which we are satiated by the spectacle of a self-consuming passion. It is, indeed, remarkable how this contrast is sometimes so formed that Pandarus represents the superior wisdom as opposed to the shortsightedness of Troilus when dominated by his passion. It is not difficult to prove that for some scenes between the two Chaucer had in his mind's eye the figures of "Philosophy" and the impris-

oned Boëthius; for besides containing innumerable popular sayings and many tit-bits, from different classical writers, the speeches of Pandarus also contain not a little from the *Consolatio*. The clever head thus knows how to take advantage of everything.

Finally, Pandarus is the figure who helps most to develop the dramatic life of the action. Just as Chaucer recognized the tragic elements in the story, so also did he perceive the dramatic possibilities which lay hidden in Boccaccio's tale. His whole genius must have forced him on to bring them to light and to make them paramount. Almost all the changes, transpositions, interpolations that he made in his original tend, if not exclusively, at least concurrently, in this direction. For, with him, all the wheels catch on to each other; one stroke strikes a thousand springs. It is mostly in the dramatic scenes, which are sometimes of a monologue sort, but are more often acted out between two or more persons, that the characters are evolved and the situations developed. The narrative portions, which serve to bind those dramatic scenes together, are of a comparatively subordinate importance. These scenes are set off with the most realistic truthfulness, even to the smallest detail, and work with the most instantaneous power; they are full of fire and force, making us shake with laughter, and rousing our interest to the highest pitch. In the fifth or last book the description falls off considerably. The situations are too unrefreshing, and partly also too undramatic. The Cryseyde-Diomedes episode gave the poet little pleasure. Troilus is condemned to passivity, and Pandarus also is *au bout de son Latin*. To make the terror of a tragic pathos die powerfully away was not Chaucer's affair. And every tragic fate is not adapted to the tragic muse. This subject was deficient in grandeur, in all that exalts. It is sufficient, therefore, if the art of the poet was able to ennoble the ambiguous or even the offensive elements of the story by the charm of a realistic, and at the same time highly poetical presentation.

How well does the poet here show himself equal to his task! If we consider the truthfulness in conception and expression, the delicacy of the motives, the well planned

arrangement of the whole, and then the abundance of diversified ideas and situations, the astonishing wealth and pliancy of the language, which, in seeming to go at random, does accurate justice to every thought and situation, the broad and smoothly flowing rush of the stanza, which is responsive to every shade of feeling—then we shall thoroughly understand the wish that Chaucer sends forth along with his poem and towards its end: “And since there is so great diversity in English, and in writing of our tongue, so pray I God that none may copy thee wrongly, nor spoil the metre by false reading. And wherever thou art read or sung, God grant that thou be understood.”

*Troilus and Cryseyde* was a book for learned and unlearned, for the poet and the philosopher, the courtier and the man of action. The “moral” Gower and the “philosophical” Strode, to whom the author addressed the work in an envoy, must have been delighted with it—each from his own point of view. But John of Gaunt was, perhaps, better able than they to appreciate the whole; and it was only natural that his family should hold the work in honor. We regard with pleasure the ornamental characters and the rich arabesques of that *Troilus* manuscript which John’s grandson, the later conqueror of Agincourt, had in his possession when Prince of Wales; and, moreover, we recall with pleasure how this same poem, which delighted the hero in the time of his extravagant youth, also exercised a mighty influence on Shakspeare, the great singer of this hero. Nor is it astonishing that Sidney, who pointed out with high enthusiasm the noble mission of poesie at a time when the great era of English poetry was in its morning glow, should have looked with admiration on the poet of *Troilus*, who, in such a benighted century, had followed the correct road so surely.

This developed art—compared with which the doings of most of his contemporaries appear childlike, or, indeed, childish, and even a work like “*Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*” seems as the effort of a novice—enables us to appreciate how much Chaucer owes to the Italian Renaissance, of which he may be called the first English pupil—not, indeed, as scholar, but as poet.

## IX.

It not infrequently happens in the life of nature, as among mankind, that when great events are taking place in any part of the earth, something cognate occurs in a smaller degree and at a great distance, without its being possible to prove or even to presume any direct connection between them. Often it is only a question of similar causes, which, under corresponding conditions, grow into effects according to the same laws. We are led to this general remark by the perception that—however lonely the eminence to which Chaucer attained in his own country as disciple of the great Italians—there were nevertheless at work, in his time, in England, certain forces which had the same direction as the mighty movement of the minds in Petrarch's home.

The majority of English scholars in this country cultivated the science of the schools within the conventional bounds and in the traditional forms. Nevertheless, a breath of the newer times emanates from an apparition like Richard Aungerville, bishop of Durham, who died in 1345. His thirst for knowledge, his love of books, has a really humanistic tinge, and we feel agreeably affected by his sympathy with poor students, for whom he strove to procure the means of living and studying. We read with pleasure, in the eighth chapter of his *Philobiblion* the description he gives of his zeal in collecting, and the way he used it to good purpose; of the joy of heart he felt at being in Paris, "the Paradise of the world," with its glorious libraries and its academic pastures. In perfect harmony with such efforts is his *Apology of Poetry*, to which his thirteenth chapter is devoted. Thoroughly humanistic also are his allusions to classical antiquity, from which he likes to draw his illustrations, and the many successful turns of his satire against the prevailing ignorance—where, for example, he makes the books complain (in chapter iv.) of the present evil times, when they are thrown out of the inside of the house and see their places taken up by dogs and birds, and that two-legged animal known as woman.



This animal has always been their enemy—whenever she sees them in a corner under the protecting cover of a cobweb, she will draw them out with scowling brow and coarse words; will despise them as useless rubbish, and wish to have them exchanged for clothing, finery, and similar bawbles.

We learn from Petrarch that he once had a learned conversation about the “Thule” of the ancients with this Richard, who was then transacting some political business with the Curia as a commissioner from his king. Aungerville, however, does not seem to have retained any lasting impression of this interview, for he did not keep his promise\* to Petrarch of clearing up all doubts on the question on his return home by consulting his rich collection of books.

Richard’s library was left by his will to the Durham College at Oxford,—founded in 1290 by the monks of his diocese,—where, under Henry IV., suitable rooms were prepared for its conservation, and where it remained till the time of Henry VIII. Here we see the beginnings of those great collections of books, and those valuable university foundations, which became in the fifteenth century the nurseries and centres of emanation of the liberal learning in England. In this connection we must not omit to mention two important creations, both of Chaucer’s time, both proceeding from Wykeham, bishop of Winchester, viz.: New College, Oxford, founded in 1379, and richly equipped, and in conjunction therewith the Latin School at Winchester, to serve as a preparation for the university studies.

Under Richard II. the Latin poetry, of which the principal productions are devoted to the description of contemporary events or to the satirical presentation of political, ecclesiastical, or social conditions, also shows some little signs of the humanistic spirit. There is undeniably a connection with the Renaissance movement of the Angevin period. Just as Richard Aungerville, in his *Philobiblion*, quotes John of Salisbury, so these later

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\* Petrarch consoled himself by thinking that Richard was unable to answer the question, or that he had not the time to fulfill his promise.



poets show an acquaintance with the works of a Nigellus or a Geoffrey of Vinsauf.

Leonine rhymed hexameters and pentameters are still cultivated. Politico-religious pamphlets frequently take the freer forms of vagrant songs (*Vagantenlieder*). Many pieces of this class, in their form and contents, even reveal the influence of similar English songs, and, indeed, the two languages are often found strangely united in the fitting up of the same poem. But with this, however, there is also to be remarked a taste for finer artistic form, and a closer following of classical models, especially in the treatment of the much-cultivated distich.

Among the efforts of the latter sort, those emanating from John Gower, whom we have previously met, have the greatest claim on our attention. Some years had passed since the time his French ballads appeared. In the meantime he and Chaucer had approached closer, and friendly intercourse had been established between them, which was fruitful of good for both. The oldest testimony of this friendship is found in a document of 1378, May 21st,—when Chaucer, on the point of starting for Milan, appointed John Gower and Richard Forrester as his legal trustees. The dedication of *Troilus* to Gower and Strode was probably made five or six years afterwards.

The poet of the French ballads had in the meantime been busy in his own way. His great work in French—we may assume it was in short rhyming couplets—which probably came from his pen before the close of the reign of Edward III., has not yet been rediscovered, and all we know about it is what can be gleaned from a contemporary Latin notice upon Gower's chief works. According to this notice the work bore the title *Speculum Meditantis*, and treated of Vices and Virtues in ten books, and of the different degrees (probably spheres of life) of this world, with the object of showing the sinner the way he should return to the knowledge of his Creator. It was therefore a religious-moral treatise, of which the Middle Ages have left us so many in prose and verse, and perhaps also—for Gower liked this—it was interspersed with satire against all classes.

The peasants' insurrection of the year 1381 made a terrible impression upon Gower, whose country home was especially visited by the horrors of those days. He shuddered at the thought of the dangers which society and the state had so narrowly escaped; and the abyss that had been opened to his eyes was by no means closed by the victory of the ruling powers. It was still yawning, and threatened destruction to the commonwealth hovering on its verge. For Gower was not superficial enough to attribute that violent movement to any special or accidental causes. It was to him essentially a symptom of a widespread disease, a warning punishment from heaven. The political errors of the government, the unhealthy social relations, the abuses rampant in the church, the wholesale immorality among the clergy and laity—therein lay the real evil. Gower therefore determined, in his *Vox Clamantis*, to hold before the world at once a picture of those days of terror, for the sake of arousing a wholesome fear, and a mirror in which it was to see with shuddering its own face and innermost being. Thus, we perceive, his tendency was the same in fact as that which underlies Langland's celebrated poem. In the execution of the poem, however, the difference in the disposition of the two poets appears. The seer and the satirist do not keep so well together in Gower as in his predecessor; their union seems rather a product of reflection. The vision that brings before us the peasants' insurrection occupies only the first portion of Gower's poem. In the following sections this popular form is given up, and, although the poet declares that he will only announce what a voice from heaven has told him, this does not produce any lasting illusion or throw any mysterious nimbus round his satire.

The impression of the allegory in the first part is peculiar: it is dreamy, confused, distressing; rather suggestive than plastic, but not without considerable effect. Men appear in the form of animals, and the separate types of animals belie their nature, growing up into dread monstrosities in their wild passions and violent aspirations.

Many details are well conceived, and the whole is really vivid, although it presents no uniform picture.

The transition to the main body of the poem is formed of reflections upon the fate of man and of the world, discussions about the justice of the complaints which seem to be occasioned by the rule of Fortune. Gower's philosophy is very simple; he solves the riddle of the world much easier than Chaucer. He takes an Old Testament point of view. He looks upon misfortune and suffering as a punishment for sin, and happiness as a reward for virtue. And thus his view of the moral world of his time—*i. e.*, his satire on all classes—results as a matter of course. What the satirist brings forward is for the most part old and well known; for mankind changes but little, and the many details could be borrowed by the poet from earlier and later predecessors. There is, however, no want of original and successful touches; and the dress and execution reveal a clear and clever head, though not especially deep, and a poet with a mastery over form, even though he should be somewhat pedantic. Many descriptions show us conditions and situations in the life of the time in a clearer light than they appear elsewhere. The whole work forms a moral picture, done up with a powerful pencil, enlivened with drastic touches, conceived in a serious sense and with laudable intention, executed with conscientious diligence, and not without wit. A sort of universal view of history is united to the warmest patriotic sentiment and a strong moral pathos, which occasionally express themselves in forcible exhortations and addresses. The poet addresses earnest words even to the young king, though he interweaves them with expressions of praise for his mental and physical endowments, and with a reference to his youth, which may excuse much, and which, in spite of many fears, inspires the poet with good hopes for the future.

The sharpest darts of Gower's satire were directed, as was then so customary and necessary, against the state of the church, against the clergy and the orders. The reader who is not so well acquainted with this branch of mediæ-

val literature might sometimes think he hears a follower of Wyclif speaking here. But Gower, however strongly he demanded a reform in the church, is in his orthodox, conservative opinions very far from Wyclif's standpoint. Indeed there is a remarkable reserve maintained in his *Vox Clamantis* toward the reformer and his following, while in his later writings he attacks him directly and without measure.

In the section treating of the military class, *i. e.*, the knighthood, the satire is kept very general. Here we learn rather the ideal knighthood of the poet's mind than the contemporary reality—such as the knight ought to be, and such as he formerly was, while now greed and worldly inclinations turn his sentiments of honor from the right path and choke his Christian feelings. Among the dangers which threaten the knight, seduction by feminine charms takes the first place. And highly characteristic of Gower, who was a severe moral preacher and at the same time a worldly poet, is the fondness with which he here gives a detailed and seductive picture of such a charming siren.

After the satire on all classes, and introduced by Nebuchadnezzar's dream, comes a comprehensive review of those vices which especially characterize the last age of the world—*i. e.*, the poet's own times ; and this takes him over to a systematic treatment of the Seven Deadly Sins. Thus we see the poet is still under the ban of the mediæval forms of expression, which he tried, indeed, externally to combine, but was unable to unite into one organic whole.

The pupil of the ancients, the disciple of Virgil and Ovid, is only seen in the execution of minor points, in numberless reminiscences, in descriptions and expressions, and in the management of his verse. And even here many mediæval elements are intermixed—such as his exaggerated fondness for word-play and similarity of sound, and very often a want of regard for the laws of quantity. But the rhythm of the classical distich is scarcely ever broken by full leonine rhyme ; the flow of the verse and the arrangement of the periods, however, often call up some classical allusion, in spite of many



stiff or hard expressions ; and, with essentially antique means, the poet not seldom attains a striking energy of expression and really poetic description. The picture of the landscape, with which the poem opens, is very lovely, and deepens by contrast the following dismal descriptions.

In spite of the somewhat humanistic coloring in his language and versification, Gower is, upon the whole, still deeply entangled in the Middle Ages. He is separated by a great gulf from the views of antiquity which were opened to the oldest humanists of Italy. He had not the faintest suspicion of the way in which they turned to account their classical education for new creations in their mother tongue.

Here we perceive the whole advantage which the ingenious author of *Troilus* drew from the study of those Italians who opened up antiquity to him, while he at the same time remained true to his native idiom. Besides Boccaccio, and even before him, Dante is distinctly the man from whom the English poet learned. In *Troilus*, and, indeed, generally in Chaucer's riper works, however often he may give a simple translation from the *Filostrato*, his whole style, in its general character, reminds us more of Dante's than of Boccaccio's. His preference for the *Divina Commedia* is occasionally shown by the fact that a simile from it is used instead of the one in his original. But this is not the most important. It was Dante's influence that led Chaucer to treat the subject in a tragic sense ; and if the far-reaching consequences of his conception were not all implied in the naïve definition of tragedy given by the master, it was nevertheless mainly by his study of the *Divine Comedy* that Chaucer's artistic insight was deepened. The rigorous arrangement of the *Troilus* tragedy, which so decidedly fixes its whole character, is without any doubt in a very large measure due to Dante's doctrine and example. This is evident even from the proems to the different books, which are formed after the precept of the great Italian and also contain direct resemblances to Dante's own proems.

In one point, however, Chaucer deviated equally from



Dante and Gower. His Muse turned decidedly away from the great burning questions of the times. He was not accustomed to take sides either in political or in religious affairs. Gower likes to look on men and affairs with a bird's-eye historical view, but Chaucer is interested in history and legend only by what is elementary and poetical, only by what appears universally human and typical in interesting individuals and events. Gower, not less than Dante and Petrarch, likes to stand up as the moral preacher of his age ; but the picture of the world and the period, revealed by Chaucer's poetry, springs entirely from artistic views and aims. In the works of the poet hitherto mentioned, the choice of the subjects is also characteristic of this tendency of his mind ; their ideality or highly fictive nature, which carries us now into an allegoric world of dreams, and now brings us to the ground of legend or tradition, forms a remarkable contrast to the realism of their treatment and execution. Chaucer's humanism was of a thoroughly contemplative and artistic character, and was practical only in so far as humanism with him was changed into humanity. Between the demands of the day, the labors in the duties of his office, and the cultivation of the Muse, there ran a sharp dividing line throughout his life.

And the service of the Muse demanded more and more exclusively the leisure of the poet. He isolated himself ever more and more from the world in his hours of relaxation. The time he had at his disposal was too niggardly meted out to him for him to be able to sacrifice a part of it to social intercourse, however much he loved society. And he only very seldom yielded to his innate love of Nature, to the inclination to revel in her enjoyment, to dream upon her breast—only on holidays, or when May brought back the songs of the birds, and flowers sprang up everywhere. As a rule he shut himself up in his room, after his day's work was done and his accounts settled, and took out a book ; still as a stone he sat and studied, until his eyes grew wearied. Thus he seemed to himself like a hermit, except in abstinence, which he never encouraged. If he took his whole life into consideration, he must have almost pitied himself—he, a

love poet, to whom the longed-for happiness of love had never come; a worldly, joyous soul, always thirsting after new impressions and experiences, but condemned to the life of a recluse; an enthusiastic student of poetry and science, whom the driest routine labors robbed of his best years, and of almost every hour of the day. What good did his diligence or talents do him? What had all his efforts gained him in the end? A certain popularity, the recognition of a few refined minds. Would posterity accord him what his age denied him? Would his name shine forth with imperishable fame, like that of his great masters, when his bones had long been turned to ashes?

When, however, he was reading or composing in his solitary hours, then it all became clear in his mind, and the narrow cell seemed to widen. He thought himself alone in a glorious, transparent temple, richly adorned with artistic hands, and filled with the august images whom his beloved poets had handed down to him. There was the burning Troy, there were Dido and Æneas. But as soon as he emerges from that charmed circle, he finds himself in a desolate void, as in an endless, sandy desert. Melancholy moments may have frequently occurred to him and aroused such feelings. But he did not long remain entangled in the maze. Philosophic contemplation, such as he had learned to practice from his Boëthius and Dante, helped him out of the fit. As on an eagle's wings Contemplation bears him to the stars; shows him the littleness and nothingness of this terrestrial sphere, and points out to him the treasure he bears within himself: the poetic fancy, which can create for him a new and more beautiful world, and the power which can confer an immortality on mighty deeds. In spirit he constructs the citadel of Fame, reposing, as it does, on most perishable foundations—on a rock of ice. The names engraven on the rock melt away in the beams of the sun, while those glittering on the northern side, although of ancient date, are still as fresh as if newly incised—enduring fame will grow up stronger in adversity than in prosperity. Players, singers, jugglers, trumpet-blowers stand round about the wondrous, brilliant hall, which owes its beautifully inwrought door

as much to accident as to superior art. All within is glittering with gold and precious stones. Aloft upon a jeweled throne sits the goddess FAME, with her shining, golden hair, her countless eyes, ears, tongues, and with her winged feet; in one moment she grows from a pigmy into giant stature. Lovely is the song of the Muses who do homage to the goddess. FAME bears upon her shoulders the heraldic arms and names of Hercules and Alexander. Two rows of columns, worked of different metals, serve as pedestals for the great poets and historians, in whose works great deeds survive: there are Flavius Josephus; the "mighty Homer," with Dares and Dictys, and Lollius—so the singer of the *Filostrato* was usually called by Chaucer—with Guido de Colonna and Geoffrey of Monmouth, the "Latin poet, Virgil," "the Venus' clerke, Ovid," Lucan, Claudian, and innumerable others. Pressing crowds of men who beseech the favor of the goddess fill the hall in turn. Very few wish to be forgotten; almost all desire renown, or, like Herostratus, a reputation, even if ever so bad. Without respect to merit, but without being adverse to merit, and dominated entirely by the whim of the moment, the goddess grants or refuses the entreaties of mortals, or does exactly the opposite to what they ask for. Fame acts in no way differently from her sister, Lady Fortune—Reputation, Renown, depends almost altogether on accidental circumstances.

And how does it go in the noisy market of life, from which the poet stands apart? What can his deprivation mean for him, to whose imagination the images are as real as reality itself? And what value have the novelties which are retailed at the World's Fair for him who sees with philosophic calm into the inner workings of the machinery, where they originate and take their form? In that restless, turning House, where rumors first are fabricated (the House of Rumor), Chaucer sees how everyone hurries to relate again that which he has scarcely heard; how a report, flying from mouth to mouth, continually grows, until it slips out by one of the innumerable openings in the House into the wide world. He sees how a truth and a lie, meeting at the same exit, struggle so long for precedence that they are blended together into one

report. He perceives, also, those classes of society who specially distribute rumors and lies—such as sailors, pilgrims, pardoners, couriers, messengers. He notices how everybody runs, throngs, pushes to catch the latest news, especially anything about love affairs.

All that he learns about Fame—real Fame, as well as Rumor—gives him good cause to be resigned, to be reconciled to his fate, and to await the future with indifference.

Thus, in his lovely and significant poem of *The House of Fame*, Chaucer presents a process of mental liberation with bright humor and elegant art, while he accomplished his own liberation by the story. No other of his poems has such a personal character as this one, which marks the climax of one species of art in middle English poetry. The allegory grows here so immediately out of the fundamental idea of the work that it remains perfectly transparent, notwithstanding the minutely detailed execution; for the inner truth of what is presented forces itself upon the reader, and never allows the impression of caprice to occur. How ingeniously soever the whole is designed and completed, we feel that there is here more than a mere play of wit; that a full and profound individuality has listened to its own promptings and spoken out its dominating sentiments and views, and was led by a sort of necessity in the choice of the form of expression.

This necessity was composed, in fact, of different elements, of which a very essential one was the intellectual atmosphere surrounding the poet, owing to his course of studies and his reading. The first canto, with its minute description of the wall pictures in the temple of glass, affords conclusive proof of the close study Chaucer had made of the *Æneid*. Virgil also supplied the poet with the main outlines in the figure of Fame, and when that source failed, Ovid made up the supplement. The description of the journey through the air is crowded with reminiscences from the most varied authors: Ovid, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Alanus de Insulis, Martianus Capella. Boëthius certainly influenced the conception of the original idea; and still more,



Dante, whose precedent determined at once the disposition and arrangement of the poem and supplied numerous motives and expressions to the story.

Toward the end of *Troilus* the poet had said, when saying farewell to his work: "Go, little book; go, my little tragedy; and may my Maker send me power before I die to make some comedy." This wish was very soon carried into execution, at least in the letter. *The House of Fame* is a comedy, according to the conception underlying that wish, and as such it was called forth by the *Divine Comedy*: from a bad beginning good is brought forth by the guidance of the higher powers. As numerous parallel passages, invocations, and such things show, Chaucer was aware that he was producing a counterpart to Dante's great poem. A work, indeed, of quite a different character—instead of a palace, it is a house, which in a small measure shows the same ground plans, and was modestly arranged for little wants, and lightly timbered, being fitted up with gay humor and, apparently, with much haste; the production of a few weeks, not of a lifetime; a work that holds the same comparison to that model as the whimsical being of Lady Fame to the eternal Justice of God.

Thus we can explain why Chaucer went back again in this work to that form of verse which had been common in his pre-Italian period, but was not again used by him afterwards. The light verse of the short rhyming couplet corresponds excellently to the unpretentious tone in which the poet, going at his ease and apparently without the slightest effort, develops the entire fullness of his rich material in the most distinct and vivid manner.

## X.

The complaint of want of leisure which Chaucer had expressed in *The House of Fame* was not uttered in vain. The poem appears to have been composed in 1384, and in the beginning of the following year a great relief was granted to the poet by the permission to have his duties of controller of customs performed by a fixed deputy.



According to all appearances, he was indebted for this favor to the mediation of the queen; for it was mainly she who filled up his newly won leisure by a commission honorable alike to him and to her.

The highly realistic conception of life that appeared in *Troilus* and the *Romance of the Rose*, and especially the cool skepticism in judging of sexual love and woman's faithfulness, had given great offense to many ladies of the court; and the queen herself must have been sorry at heart to see such great art spent in the description of subjects so unpleasant in themselves and so little honorable to the feminine gender. By way of atonement she now ordered the poet, in her gracious, winning way, to write a book for the glorification of love and women. This commission did not come unseasonably to Chaucer. With the many-sidedness of his talents, he had never gone as far as actual unbelief, either in this or in other questions; on the contrary, the womanly ideal attracted him very much; he devoted to the Virgin Mary a touching worship. The appearance and deportment of the young queen had made on him the deepest and most pleasing impression. He gladly yielded again to her influence, to which we are indebted for the *Parlement of Foules*, and deserted for a time the tendency preferred by John of Gaunt. More than once he had read with edification Ovid's *Heroides* and similar works, and even since the Book of the Duchess he had projected the plans of poems treating of ideal women. Now, when the commission of the queen coincided with the favor granting him more leisure, he gladly set about the work.

For the first time in his career he had here to write a collection of tales, and thus to produce a work similar to many others transmitted by antiquity, and the Middle Ages had brought out a still greater number in different varieties and on subjects sacred and profane. Boccaccio himself, who of all his predecessors came nearest to our poet, had left several such, among which may be mentioned the Latin prose work *De Mulieribus Claris*, the contents of which came pretty close to the nature of the book now to be written by Chaucer. Besides the

*Seven Wise Masters* that wreath of romances, the cycle of the legends had been especially worked over by writers in the English tongue. Although the subject Chaucer had to handle was of a thoroughly secular nature, he nevertheless brought it under the title of a legend. *Cupid's Legend of the Saints* is the title he gives in a later poem to the work known to us as the *Legende of Goode Women*, and he conceives the separate heroines as martyrs of love ; for the tragic end of the fate of those women who remain constant in true love, and whose unselfish devotion or steadfast chastity is generally opposed to the falseness and reckless egotism of men, was from the first firmly fixed in the poet's mind, at least in the majority of cases.

The plan sketched out by Chaucer comprised the legends of twenty heroines. The series is opened by Cleopatra, the queen who would not survive her Antony's fall. The last was to be the history of another queen, the incomparable Alcestis, who outshone all others in noble womanhood and true fidelity, in whose likeness the poet thought of celebrating his own high patroness, England's youthful queen. In his *Book of Celebrated Women* Boccaccio had similarly ended with the history of a contemporary queen,\* to whom he dedicated his book, at least indirectly.

In the course of time Chaucer's plan for the choice of his other heroines, and the order in which they should appear, may have experienced some alterations. Thus the legend of Philomene (Philomele) in the transmitted collection seems to have had no place in the original plan, as she does not fit in very naturally in the framework of the whole, which is, however, rather elastic. But from the first the poet's attention was mainly directed to subjects from classical antiquity, from ancient history, and particularly from antique legends ; Ovid's *Heroides* occurred to him as the work which should supply the main contingent of his heroines.

The rather extensive plan was only about half completed. The history of only ten women in nine legends has been transmitted ; and weighty reasons, supported

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\* Joan, Queen of Jerusalem and Sicily.

partly by positive documents, justify us in the assumption that Chaucer prosecuted the work no farther. In a later work, indeed, the author mentions a number of other legends as belonging to the work and already existing ; but there is scarcely a doubt that in this we have only a poetic anticipation, which unfortunately turned out deceptive. When the poet wrote that passage, the *Legende of Goode Women* was evidently recurring vividly to his mind, and he was nursing the intention and the hope of completing it in the near or remote future. Like so many of the other hopes and plans of his later years, this, also, was carried with him to the grave.

The existing fragment is introduced by a Prologue, which presents the occasion and plan of the whole in an ingenious and charming manner. For the last time Chaucer here makes use of the traditional form of an allegorical vision. We are placed at the commencement of the month of May. The poet—who has passed the whole day in the meadows among the flowers, listened to the song of the birds, and regarded reverently his favorite flower, the daisy—now in a dream imagines himself again in the same situation. He sees the god of love coming in the distance. He leads a queen by the hand, whose garb and head-dress resemble the color of the daisy, and whose lovely face bears the evidence of the highest womanly grace and goodness. Nineteen ladies in royal robes form her personal suite ; a company of women, extending farther than the eye can reach, follows in her train. On seeing the daisy, they all kneel down and sing praises to the flower as the symbol of womanly virtue ; then, sitting down, they group themselves around the god of love and the queen. Amor perceives the poet, and attacks him with sharp words—he would rather see a worm, he says, coming so close to his flower than him, his deadly foe ; for it is he who combats his adorers and slanders his old followers, and makes men disinclined to the service of love ; he has translated the *Romance of the Rose*, which means a heresy against the religion of love, and has sung things of Cryseyde which undermine men's faith in the fidelity of women. He has indeed abjured his law ; but cruel punishments will be inflicted if he live.

Thereupon the queen intervenes, and, in a long speech, undertakes the defense of the accused poet. She warns the god not to lend his ear to the flatterers or slanderers of his court, exhorts him to discretion, justice, mercy, and gives an ideal picture of the duties of the kingly office. The accused may have erred, without perhaps thinking it any harm—he is accustomed to write on all sorts of subjects. Perhaps it was under a command he dared not venture to resist, that he wrote those two books. If not, then he may feel justly sorry for his deeds. But yet it is not so bad to translate the writings of ancient authors as wickedly to compose such in defiance of Amor. Before he is condemned, let him, at least, be heard. And if he should even have nothing to produce by way of excuse, but beg humbly for pardon, the god might, nevertheless, forgive him. She reminds the god how faithfully Chaucer has served him as a love poet as far as he was able, and she here enumerates his principal works. In conclusion she earnestly entreats the god, for her sake, to pardon the poet, who on his part will swear to make amends. Amor cannot resist the prayer of the eloquent pleader, he pardons the accused, and commits him entirely into the hands of his gracious patroness. By way of atonement she orders him to write the legend, and commands him to hand it over, when finished, in her name, to “the queen at Eltham or at Sheen.” The poet then learns from Amor the name of his protectress, which she herself, indeed, had previously given. It is the Queen Alcestis, who died for her husband, but was again delivered from the under-world by Hercules. On this a reference is made to a lovely myth, invented, it would seem, by Chaucer himself, according to which Alcestis was changed by the gods into a daisy. Amor bids the poet finish up the commanded work with the legend of Alcestis, and gives him some further directions how it should be carried out; Chaucer then takes to his books and begins the work.

It is clear that the Alcestis of the Prologue represents Richard's Queen Anne, whose favorite flower may have been the daisy, as it was the poet's. Alcestis's influence over the god of love, and the way she makes this influ-



ence felt, refer not only, as the allegory mainly requires, to the commanding position occupied by Anne as the crown and model of women in the region of love, so that she wins again for the poet the favor of the whole sex; they refer also, as is absolutely plain from some passages in her speech in his defense, to the cordial intimacy of the English queen with her husband, and to the beneficent influence she generally exercised on his decisions. Thus the poet was able to interweave the tenderest homage to his queen with a delicate allusion to the direct occasion of his poem, and, without in any way entering on the politics of the day, to give earnest exhortations to the young king.

After the Prologue came the legends: Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle and Medea, Lucretia, Ariadne, Philomele, Phyllis, Hypermnestra.

The sources which Chaucer used for his story, and which he generally mentions, though not always in the right place, are, besides Ovid's *Heroides*, his *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, Virgil's *Æneid*, and in smaller measure Livy; further, Florus, Guido de Colonna, and, presumably, Hyginus. Thus they are all Latin writers, and, with one exception, belong to the ancients. And even this exception is characteristic—while Chaucer here prefers Guido at the expense of Benoît de Sainte More, whom he knew well, he does the exact opposite to what he did in *Troilus*.

Thus the period of Italian influence is followed by a period, which is indeed short, of an almost exclusively old classical character, and which corresponds with the other not merely in time. Chaucer was spurred by the Italian masters to a more intensive study of their Roman models, and was thus made aware of many of their excellences. The *House of Fame* is symbolical of this relation; in the first book it takes us back entirely to Virgil's world—though started under the influence of the *Divine Comedy*.

In reference to his Latin models, the poet preserves his independence quite as much as when he draws from Boccaccio or Dante. He borrows numerous beauties from them directly, he takes over a multitude of passages



wholesale into his own language, and as a rule very happily ; but he is nowhere untrue to his own style, and in no place does he forget the plan and character of his own work or the claims of his readers. According to the material before him, and the purpose he has for the moment in view, he makes simple or serious changes in the characters, in the details of the action, and in the story, sometimes shortening and summarizing, sometimes enlarging and supplementing. He weakens down many motives or lets them fall out entirely, so that he may strengthen others or introduce absolutely new ones. He often brings together features for one and the same story from various sources, and among such features some which originally belonged to quite a different connection. By the tone and color which he gives to his story, he everywhere brings his characters and subjects nearer to his own time and people, and thus spreads over them a sort of local tinge. Notwithstanding the unusual fates and the extraordinary station in life of his heroes, his tales may be compared to domestic tragedies. The mythological machinery appears reduced to a minimum, is handled with a certain skepticism, or sometimes completely suppressed. On the other hand, the greatest possible space is accorded to pathetic scenes, speeches, addresses. Here, as everywhere else, the poet's attention is directed above all to the psychological elements which decide the action ; and, in the conception prevailing in this poem, the women come off in a moral sense as well as possible, but the men as a rule very badly. Not being narrowed in by any classical etiquette, and not being bound down in this case by the tradition of any naïve popular superstition, Chaucer does not allow himself, in the smallest degree, to be overawed by the sonorous names of the antique heroes and demi-gods, but applies to them the standard of common morality in all its rigor, without in any way accepting the excuse founded on the guidance of higher powers. Thus Theseus and Jason are to him not only cunning egotists, reckless seducers of women, and crafty traitors ; but even Æneas loses altogether his nimbus of piety by his faithless and ungrateful conduct toward the good Dido.

The poet has not succeeded equally well in all the

tales. The impression of completeness and uniform fullness is best produced by the legend of Thisbe, taken from the *Metamorphoses* (iv. 55-166), and the Legend of Dido, excluding the last verse, drawn from the *Æneid*. The former may be taken as a model imitation, which, though true in all essential points to the original, raises the impression of affecting simplicity by its somewhat broader descriptions. In the latter we see a talent that can select with sure tact, can condense cleverly, and has the gift of fresh description with an independent execution of the details and an individual management of the characters. In Hypsipyle and Medea, the section in which Jason gains the favor of Hypsipyle, by the help of Hercules, attracts us in particular—a passage which, according to all appearances, depends on the free invention of the poet and introduces a piece of delightful comic intrigue into the tragic action. The art of building up and supplementing a story, from hints\* previously gathered, is shown most decidedly in the legend of Phyllis, which indeed suffers in its narrative portion from a certain dry condensation. In Ariadne, the boldly invented dialogue between Theseus and the daughter of the Cretan king is not so well brought out, in spite of its many striking touches; but a better effect is produced by the description, taken from Ovid's tenth *Heroïde* and drawn in a beautifully rising climax, of Ariadne's anxiety and pain when she awakes and finds herself abandoned. Two chief points stand out well in the compressed history of Cleopatra, for which Florus supplied the material; viz., the vivid though typical battle-scene, and the pathetic monologue at the end.

On the whole, the earlier tales are better than the later ones. It looks as if the poet gradually grew wearied with the work, or as if he were in a hurry to finish his programme.† The task necessarily involved a certain monotony—a number of related subjects had to be treated in the same spirit. Besides, with reference to the extent of his plan, the poet believed himself here compelled to a greater condensation of the stories than he

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\* Compare Ovid, *Heroïdes*, ii.

† Compare Phyllis, 61-64.

generally observed.\* For easy, flowing narrative, long developments, extensive miniature painting, there was here no room. And thus, from the tragic nature of his subjects and the character of his work, Chaucer could not show that play of humor he generally indulged in. This constraint must have been harder than anything else on the poet.

We sometimes feel as if he found a difficulty in bridling his humor, and how it nevertheless frequently breaks forth at the proper place. At the conclusion of *Phyllis*, he seems to show a wish to indemnify himself for the unsatisfying story by a humorous ending: "Take care, ye women, of your subtle foe, since even up till our day similar examples may be seen, and in love trust no man but me."

The real importance of the *Legende of Goode Women* lies in the fact that it was a study of the poet's in what was for him a new field, and in a style he had as yet little cultivated. Of such short tales he had hitherto written but few, and, with the exception of the *Life of St. Cecilia*, only as episodes in greater works of quite a different nature. He here made his first attempt in that domain of cyclic story-telling in which he was afterwards to gain his fadeless laurels. And here for the first time he employed that metrical form† which holds such a happy mean between the chatty tone of the short rhymed couplet and the lyrical ring of the strophe; viz., the rhymed couplet of ten syllables, which was raised by him to the classical metre of the poetic romance, and which, under the name of the heroic couplet, was the most extensively employed in later English poetry. The poet had not yet finished the legend of *Hypermnestra*, when his whole attention was called to political events, in the immense web of which his own fate was interwoven.

From about the beginning of this period the young king had shown more decided signs of freeing himself from the tutelage of his uncles and old councilors, and of managing the government alone; and with this his own willful, tyrannical character, his love of luxury, and

\* Compare Prologue, 570-577, *Cleopatra*, 37-41.

† See also Prologue, 262.

passion for pleasure were more and more plainly revealed, and the influence of his favorites and their followers became boundless. In spite of the suspicious treatment of his nephew, and in order to avoid a definite rupture, John of Gaunt had recently kept himself in the background, and, on the invitation of the Portuguese court, had now sailed to Spain in the summer of 1386, with a splendid retinue and an army of 20,000 men, to gain the crown of Castile. Richard was glad to see him go, and had bid him a friendly farewell. But if he had feared an opponent of his plans in his elder uncle, there soon arose for him a still more dangerous opponent in his youngest uncle, Thomas of Buckingham, who had been made Duke of Gloucester in 1385. Thomas was not less ambitious than John, while he was more tenacious, hard, and reckless, and formed the rallying-point and dominant spirit of the numerous party which was recruited at first from the aristocracy, but finally from all ranks in the kingdom, and combated the influence of the court party and the king's advisers. A deep rift rent the nation. In the internal as in the external policy there was a glaring want of any firm and definite rule. The religious and church questions had not yet received any satisfactory settlement. The campaign undertaken in 1385 had no decisive result. In the summer of the following year a French invasion threatened the kingdom, now greatly weakened in its defenses by the expedition to Spain. This danger was, indeed, now removed ; but a deep dissatisfaction at the conduct of the war, at the application made by the king's advisers and favorites of the taxes wrung with such difficulty from the nation, increased in ever-widening circles.

Under such circumstances the Parliament assembled on October 1, 1386, and was required to grant the necessary subsidies to the crown, ostensibly for continuing the war against France. Chaucer attended this Parliament as member for the county of Kent.

The keenness of the existing contrasts was seen at the very beginning, and great violence was exhibited on all sides. The attempts of the crown to intimidate the Parliament were opposed by a more decided stand and



by increased demands from the opposition, which included both the Lords and the Commons ; and the overbearing king was compelled to yield bit by bit, after repeated struggles. He was obliged to dismiss his trusted chancellor as well as his treasurer ; and the former, the avaricious and venal Michael de la Pole, whom he had made Earl of Suffolk, was immediately impeached by Parliament, was quickly convicted, and condemned to imprisonment. A standing council of fourteen members was forced on the king, and was intrusted with the most extensive powers to examine the misconduct of the previous *régime* and to reform existing abuses.

With a few exceptions all the members of this council were antagonists of the former *régime*, and among them was the ambitious Thomas of Gloucester, the most zealous and influential of all.

Many officials, not only creatures of the court, but also trusty servants of the king, especially in the department of the finances, may have fallen as victims of the new governing authorities and the recently appointed commissions. Chaucer was one of the king's trusty servants, and was dismissed from his office as controller of customs in December of that eventful year.

The attempt at an armed reaction which Richard and his party began in the following year was frustrated by the rapid and decided conduct of Gloucester and his allies, the Earls of Arundel, Warwick, Nottingham, and Derby. On December 20 the king's troops were defeated at the bridge of Radcot in Berkshire ; their leader, Richard's privileged favorite, Robert de Vere, Marquis of Dublin and Duke of Ireland, jumped into the river and saved his life and liberty by swimming. Gloucester and his party made the most reckless use of their victory. The intention of removing the king himself had been violently opposed by Thomas of Nottingham and Henry of Derby before the battle of Radcot. But Richard's favorites and followers fell as victims to the justice or the animosity of the victor. The Earl of Suffolk, the Duke of Ireland, and also a third member of the guilty leaders, viz., the archbishop of York, saved their lives by flight. The victors, therefore, had to content themselves with de-



claring the forfeiture of their estates or temporalities and banishing them forever from the country. The Lord Chief Justice Tresilian and Sir Nicholas Brembre met a harder fate and died on the gallows at Tyburn. The under-sheriff of Middlesex, Thomas Usk, fell by the executioner's hand, and his head was placed as a warning over Newgate prison. Chief Justice Bealknap, and five other judges concerned in the unsuccessful *coup d'état*, had the death sentence commuted, on the personal intercession of the Primate and all the other bishops, into banishment to Ireland with loss of goods and office. The king's confessor, the bishop of Chichester, shared their fate.

Universal sympathy was excited for the fate of the last victims of this partisan justice; four of the king's trusty servants, viz., Sir Simon Burley, John Beauchamp, John Salisbury, and Jacob Berners, in spite of all the efforts of the king and Queen Anne, were put to death with the sword, or in a still more cruel manner, in May, 1388.

All this must have affected Chaucer's mind most deeply. He had known so many of the men, whose tragic fate was now accomplished, in the days of their prosperity and splendor; some of them were personally intimate with him, their names were associated with affairs and events which belonged to a happy period of his own life. Sir Nicholas Brembre, who was so deeply entangled in Richard's reckless enterprise, had been several times Lord Mayor of London, and only a short time since was Chaucer's colleague as royal receiver of customs in London. Sir Simon Burley, an approved old servant of Edward III. and the Black Prince, and tutor of the young Richard, had conducted the negotiations for his marriage with Anne of Bohemia; the tears of the queen and the prayers of the king were not able to save him now from a traitor's death. What a dismal aftermath to the lovely idyl in the *Parlement of Foules*!

Death had in the meantime also deprived Chaucer of his wife. Whatever the married relations between the two may have been, the departure of the mother of his children cannot have been without effect on the poet's

heart, especially at a time of the deepest and most painful excitement.

To all these sorrows came the cares for daily bread, pressing embarrassments for want of money. By the loss of his wife Chaucer was seriously curtailed in his income. It was rightly interpreted as a sign of great distress when he made over the two pensions which he drew as a court official to a certain John Scalby on May 1, 1388. In his necessity he probably sold him the pension.

And thus, in the period we are now describing, Chaucer had to experience the serious, the sad, and the terrible at one and the same time. All this, indeed, was not able to break his vital energy; but it could damp his joy in life for a time, and for a short period frightened humor from his side. The gay and worldly poet felt himself driven to serious contemplation and to an earnest introspection into his own inner world, and at first his feelings may have again taken a decidedly religious coloring. Such feelings seem to show themselves by a kind of intermittent echo in the poems he wrote immediately afterwards, but otherwise we can scarcely observe any interruption in Chaucer's productiveness. Their subject is the glorification of maidenly purity, womanly patience and devotion—themes which are closely related to *Cupid's Legend of the Saints*.

The *Tale of Virginia*, written in heroic, short rhyming couplets, reminds us strongly of that work. In subject it is closely allied to the *Legend of Lucretia*, while its manner of treatment resembles still more the style observed in other parts of that collection. But the exposition of the minute characterization and of the heroine's portrait, with its broad rhetorical ornamentation, has received a peculiar coloring. Chaucer took some essential traits for this portion from the second part of the *Romance of the Rose*.

And though he quotes Livy, in the story he unfortunately follows the mutilated and vulgar tradition such as he found it in Jehan de Meung; in this version, among other things, Virginius cuts off the head of his own daughter and brings it to the unjust judge Appius. The fidelity to nature which breaks forth in some passages in

Chaucer's poem—especially touching is the dialogue between father and daughter—can neither remove nor cover the consequences of that fundamental mistake. The deep religious earnestness in which the idea of chastity is here conceived is characteristic of the period in which *Virginia* was composed; in a most peculiar manner, and with impressive exhortations she addresses female-educators and parents to preserve and cultivate by rigorous training this precious jewel of chastity in their children.\* The poet's pedagogic zeal even carried him on to use plain and drastic comparisons such as popular preachers were accustomed to employ; † although the context of the passages where they occur, and the character of the whole poem, most decidedly exclude the intention of producing any comic effect. The concluding words of the tale, which refer to the punishment of the guilty and particularly to the end of the unjust judge, might very well have been written under the impression of the tragic events of which Chaucer had been a witness in the first half of the year 1388: "Beware, for no man knows how God will smite, in any rank, nor in what way the worm of conscience may cause the wicked life to tremble, though it be so secret that no one know of it but himself and God."

Chaucer made a lucky hit in his *Griselda*. We may assume that the story is well known—it is related to the contents of the *Lai le Fresne*, as well as to the Scottish-Danish ballad of *Beautiful Anne*. Boccaccio reproduced it with much grace in his *Decamerone*, where the tale, as last in the series, happily contrasts with the light tone and roguish or even frivolous character of most of the other romances. Boccaccio's art, however, is not able to remove from the reader of to-day the displeasure, or, indeed, the feeling of revolt, produced by the overdone description of the delicate question. It requires a certain abstraction from the reality of the moral world around us,

\* We can conceive how Chaucer, who had hardly found time to care much about the religious and moral education of his children, must have felt himself reminded of the responsibility reposing on parents or teachers just at this time when his own children had lost their mother.

† Compare line 83 and following (*Canterbury Tales*, Tyrwhitt, 12, 017, etc.):

"A thief of vension, that hath forlaft  
His likerousness, and all his oldē craft  
Can keep a forest best of any man."

to experience the pure effect of Griselda's touching character. The enjoyment of this story was easier to the Middle Ages, which were so accustomed to abstractions of every kind, and which might turn aside for once with pleasure from the extravagant conceits of lady-worship and the picture of uncomely types of women, such as the satirists and fabliaux poets described them. And thus we can understand how the story so delighted Petrarch that he translated it from Italian into Latin. This work was a child of his old age—the letter to Boccaccio in which he inclosed it is dated June 8, 1373, the last year that he saw to the end. Petrarch changed nothing in the material of the story, but in many places he extended the description, and gave to the whole a less simple but stronger rhetorical coloring. The Italian novelle has more unconstrained grace; the Latin version, where many of the additions seem inspired by deep feeling, brings out the fundamental idea more clearly.

This circumstance, joined to the reverence that Chaucer felt for Petrarch's "sweet rhetoric" and "high style," may have decided him to follow the copy instead of the original. Chaucer's relation to the subject, as to the author, also explains the choice of the seven-lined stanza instead of the heroic rhyming couplet for the form of his poem, as well as the narrow limits within which he shows in this case his originality. In all essential points he follows Petrarch; whose rhetoric, however, appears subdued in the simpler, more familiar and homely manner of expression of the English poet, and is turned into poetry by the artistic form of his verse. The story of Griselda does not belong to those works upon which the Father of English poetry has impressed the stamp of his mastery; but nowhere do we hear the tender tones of his feelings sound more sweetly; nowhere do we see so plainly the poet's leaning to what is truly womanly, as in the affecting song of this unchangeable, loving, quiet sufferer. Among the few additions of Chaucer's own, there is one passage of especial beauty. Griselda has to quit her husband's house, and can only take back with her what she brought at first from her father's home. "I know well," she says, in her departing speech, "that my whole

dowry consisted in wretched old clothes, which were now hard to find." At this she is overcome with the feeling of the contrast between that time and now—"Oh, good God, how gentle and how kind you seemed by your speech and your looks on that day when our marriage was made."

Another passage intercalated by Chaucer may be mentioned, as it is perhaps indicative of the time when the poem was composed. The enthusiastic reception given to Griselda's daughter, as the pretended new bride of the Marquis, by the same people who had formerly received the mother with acclamation, and who only a short time before had so strongly condemned the wayward cruelty of her husband, forces the poet to the following bitter address which he puts into the mouth "of the sober people of that town":

O stormy people, unsad <sup>1</sup> and ever untrue,  
And undiscreet, and changing as a fane,  
Delighting ever in rombel <sup>2</sup> that is new,  
For like the moonē waxen ye and wane ;  
Aye full of clapping, dear enough a jane,<sup>3</sup>  
Your doom <sup>4</sup> is false, your constance evil preveth <sup>5</sup>  
A full great fool is he that on you lieveth.<sup>6</sup> \*

<sup>1</sup> Unsteady.

<sup>2</sup> Rumor.

<sup>3</sup> A small coin (from Genoa).

<sup>4</sup> Judgment.

<sup>5</sup> Proveth.

<sup>6</sup> Believeth.

Who can here help thinking of the grand reception prepared for Richard in London on November 10, 1187, by the same citizens who only a few months previously had sided violently with his opponents, and whose party they were soon afterward again to join—"quā mobiles erant ut arundo, et nunc cum dominis, nunc cum rege, nusquam stabiles," says a contemporary historian ? †

## XI.

Shortly after the completion of *Griselda*, Chaucer again experienced the inconstancy of popular favor. The government of Gloucester and his associates had at last become thoroughly hated ; as they had no good results

\* The Clerk's Tale, vi. l. 57, ff. Tyrwhitt, Cant. Tales, 8871, ff.

† Mon. Evesh., *Historia vitæ et regni Ricardi II.*, ed. Hearne, p. 85.



to show, by way of compensation, for the bloody executions they had ordered, the good will of a large portion of the people turned away from them in disgust. People turned from the cruel and ambitious uncle to the young king, his nephew ; who, indeed, seemed to deserve consideration and indulgence rather than rigorous severity. Richard was therefore able to seize the reins of government again into his own hands about the beginning of May, 1389. Gloucester and his party were taken by surprise and felt their weakness : the king's decisive manner in showing them his intentions secured to him a peaceful victory. He had learned something by his bitter experiences of the previous years ; he had learned to control himself and to dissemble ; and for a time he governed with such wisdom and conciliation as to gain universal sympathy. How could anything but good be expected of a prince who intrusted the great seal to a man like William of Wykeham, the venerable and experienced bishop of Winchester ? of a prince who showed so little resentment that he endeavored to attach to himself, by decided tokens of his favors, the more moderate of his opponents, such as his uncle of York and his cousin of Derby ; and who even tried to bring about a good understanding with his worst enemies, such as Gloucester, Arundel, and Warwick ?

Better days, days of grace and of internal peace, seemed to have dawned for England. The blessings also of external peace were not wanting ; on the 18th of June a three-years' truce was concluded with France, in which Scotland also joined.

The fate of our poet was again seen to be dependent on the alternations of state politics. The evil influences, which had been paralyzed by the benevolence of the king and the favor of the queen, were now utterly frustrated. The Earl of Derby, who had great influence with the monarch, was son and heir of the Duke of Lancaster, and was certainly then well disposed to the author of *Troilus*. The duke himself, Chaucer's old patron, was called home from Guienne by the king during the first days of the new *régime*. He only landed in England in November ; but long before his arrival, a new, honorable, and lucrative office had been given to his *protégé*.

On June 12, 1389, Chaucer was appointed "clerk of the king's works" at Westminster, the Tower of London, the Castle of Berkhamstead, and at several other crown possessions. The duties imposed by this office were of various kinds, and, we should think, much more attractive to the poet than his monotonous calculations as receiver of customs. Sometimes he had to procure workmen and materials for the restoration of some building—as St. George's Chapel, Windsor; sometimes he had to see after the erection of stages from which the king and queen could watch a tournament. At another time he was appointed on a commission for repairing the embankments and ditches along the Thames, between Woolwich and Greenwich. The traveling up and down the country in connection with his duties gave him frequent opportunities to study the beauties of nature. On such occasions, however, he also had experiences that were undesirable—such as the insecurity of the public highways; for, on the 3d of September, 1390, he was attacked near the "Fowle Oke" by robbers, who not only relieved him of twenty pounds from the royal cash-box, and some other objects, but also took his horse. But, on the whole, we may well consider this period of official life—unfortunately but short—as very acceptable to Chaucer. For the production of his poetry one thing was of the highest importance, viz., that he was allowed to do by proxy what he did not feel inclined to do himself.

And now his humor, after being long suppressed, began to reassert itself in his emotional soul; chords which would have been struck much earlier had it not been for the unfortunate years through which he passed now began to sound with might, and his comic vein to flow more abundantly than ever. It is also very remarkable how the subjects to which Chaucer turned his attention, have from this time onward a decidedly popular impress; formerly he moved in a world of dreams or in an unattainable idealism; but now he prefers to stand upon the ground of reality, and, with the necessary variations, to treat of things recent and local. The preponderance of the comic element in the later effusions of his Muse depends largely on this change to realism, as does also the prevalence of the heroic couplet for the

form of his verse ; and henceforth, when speaking of his metre, we shall always understand that the heroic couplet is meant, unless we expressly state the contrary.

The "Wife of Bath" is a thoroughly English and popular character. Her name had probably been a sort of proverb before the poet undertook to make it immortal. This he did in a poem of a very remarkable plan and character ; it might be called the "confessions," or even the "autobiography and self-characterization," of the Wife of Bath. It was afterwards incorporated among the *Canterbury Tales*, where it is known as the *Preamble (or Prologue) of the Wyf of Bathe*.

The Wife of Bath forms the most glaring contrast imaginable to Griselda. The latter is chaste, serious, constant, faithful, quiet, patient, unselfish, humble, true—the former is wanton, bent on pleasure and show, whimsical, garrulous, contentious, arrogant, tyrannical, revengeful, subtle, an incarnation of the egotism of sensual desires. All the weaknesses that satirists of ancient or modern times have advanced or charged against the amiable sex ; all that Theophrastus in his *Golden Book*, and following him, Jerome, in his treatise against Jovinianus,\* or what the epistle of Valerius adduces against Rufinus, whatever jests occur in the *Romance of the Rose*, or are dramatically expressed in many a fabliau—all supplemented and condensed by the poet's experience and intuition—are found here vividly portrayed in the most concrete and typical form. But as the Wife of Bath herself unrolls her own picture with a flippant ease and a delightful mixture of ingenuousness and confidential impudence not without wit, and begins with the greatest indignation to quote the sayings of learned woman-haters, the comic effect of her story and descriptions is raised to the highest pitch, and the satire loses very much of its bitterness, but nothing whatever of its pungency. We can almost hear, and see bodily before us, the well-to-do middle class Englishwoman, in her heavy and somewhat gaudy garments, her scarlet stockings, her red cheeks, her saucy looks, her sensual mouth, her quick, energetic movements, her glib tongue

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\* This is Chaucer's main authority ; see Appendix.

and penetrating voice ; and what she relates becomes to us as vivid as if we had ourselves beheld the individual incidents.

The original introduction, which was omitted when the story was incorporated in the *Canterbury Tales*, probably took the reader into a company discussing the sorrows—and, doubtless, also the joys—of the married state. Possibly there was a comprehensive plan, which can scarcely have been carried out ; possibly the intention was to have different persons relate in succession their experiences—or their views as gathered from different authorities—of marriage. But the Wife of Bath can speak from personal experience, for she has been married five times since her twelfth year. She begins with a long-winded and very fluent *oratio pro domo*. She says to marry frequently is nowhere forbidden in the Scriptures, as far as she can make out ; virginity, indeed, is recommended as better, but that is only an advice, not a command ; she says she prefers the text : “ Be fruitful and multiply ” ; how, indeed, can the race be recruited if nobody marries ? She spins out these well known arguments so cleverly, adorning them with such delicious parenthetical remarks, that they seem almost new. She then begins to speak of her five husbands, and how she lived with them. Three of them were good, *i.e.*, old, rich, and madly in love with her. It was therefore easy for her to get the better of them ; and the art she employed to bend the poor men entirely to her will, and to secure to herself perfect freedom for her own private pleasures, seems to us as a sort of luxury—as a wanton and practical proof of her own mastery rather than as a necessary means to the end in view.

For as a horse, I couldē bite and whine ;  
 I couldē plain,<sup>1</sup> thogh I was in the guilt,  
 Or ellēs oftentime I had been spilt.<sup>2</sup>  
 Whoso first cometh to the mill, first grint.<sup>3</sup>  
 I plained first, so was our war ystint.<sup>4</sup>  
 They were full glad to excusen them full blive<sup>5</sup>  
 Of thing, the which they never agilt<sup>6</sup> their live.\*

<sup>1</sup> Complain. <sup>2</sup> Killed. <sup>3</sup> Ground. <sup>4</sup> Stopped. <sup>5</sup> Quickly. <sup>6</sup> Sinned.

\* Tyrwhitt, *Canterbury Tales*, verse 5968, *Wife of Bath's Preamble*, l. 386 ff.



Her very persistence and volubility of tongue, of which she gives some brilliant illustrations in her story, must have assured her of the victory in every domestic quarrel. "So help me God, though I had to make my will this instant, I never owed them a word that I left unpaid; I brought it about by my wit that they held it best to give in, else we should never have had peace. For though he looked as fierce as a lion, yet he gained not his end. Then I would say, 'Now, my dear, take care! how meek Wilken, our sheep, seems. Come nearer, Mannikin, let me kiss your cheek. You ought to be patient and mild and have a sweet temper, since you are always preaching of the patience of Job. Since you can preach so well, suffer also; and if you don't, we shall certainly teach you that it is better to live in peace with a wife. One of us two must certainly yield; and as the man is more reasonable than the woman, it is your part to practice patience.'" Her fourth husband was a "reveler" a scapegrace; but how she plagued him for it, exciting him to jealousy, and frying him in his own grease! "By God, on earth I was his purgatory, for which I trust his soul is now in glory." She took her fifth husband for love. He was young and handsome, had studied at Oxford, and boarded in the house of her gossip Alison. She had made his acquaintance during the lifetime of her fourth husband, and married him a month after the other's death. Yet how often did she repent of it afterwards! He treated her badly and often beat her with his fists. All the same she loved him—even because he was sparing of his affection. But however much she loved him, she would nevertheless not give up her freedom of movement, nor her inveterate visiting from house to house, her going out to wakes, processions, preachings, pilgrimages, miracle plays, weddings, funerals. He therefore found it necessary to read her long sermons, showing her examples, from sacred and profane history, of cruel husbands and bad wives. He had a big book, which he was never tired of reading day and night. It contained numerous works of the most different authors bound up together; such as Valerius and Theophrastus, Jerome against Jovinianus,



Tertullian, Chrysippus, Trotula, Heloise, *Solomon's Proverbs*, Ovid's *Art of Love*, and many other amusing stories.\* In his leisure hours it was his chief pleasure to read about bad wives in this book. One evening by the fire he was reading to his wife at great length and with special emphasis. The proverbs and examples seemed going on forever, when, no longer able to contain her fury :

All suddenly three leavës have I plight<sup>1</sup>  
 Out of his book, right as he read, and eke  
 I with my fist so took him on the cheek,  
 That in our fire he backward fell adown.  
 And up he start as doth a wood<sup>2</sup> lion,  
 And with his fist he smote me on the head  
 That on the floor I lay as I were dead.†

<sup>1</sup> Plucked.    <sup>2</sup> Mad.

After this blow she was somewhat hard of hearing, "somedeel deaf," as the poet remarks in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* : but let us hear how the scene continued :

And when he saw how stillë that I lay,  
 He was aghast, and would have fled away,  
 Till at the last out of my swoon I braid<sup>3</sup>  
 "Oh, hast thou slain me, falsë thief?" I said,  
 "And for my land thus hast thou murdered me?  
 Ere I be dead, yet will I kissen thee."  
 And near he came, and kneeled fair adown,  
 And saidë, "Deare sister Alisoun,  
 As help me God, I shall thee never smite :  
 That I have done it is myself to wite.<sup>4</sup>  
 Forgive it me, and that I thee beseek."  
 And yet eftsoons I hit him on the cheek,  
 And said "Thief, thus much am I awreke,<sup>5</sup>  
 Now will I die, I may no longer speak!" ‡

<sup>3</sup> Woke.    <sup>4</sup> Blame.    <sup>5</sup> Avenged.

In the end, however, with "muchel care and woe, they fell accorded by themselven two." He gave her the reins, "the governance to house and land, of his tongue and of his hand"; she made him burn his book—and after she

\* See Appendix.

† Line 790 ff. ; Tyrwhitt, *Canterbury Tales*, line 6372 ff.

‡ Line 798 ff. ; Tyrwhitt, *Can. Tales*, line 6380 ff.

had got the mastery they had no more quarreling but lived in mutual confidence and wedded peace.

Chaucer evidently wrote here *con amore*; hence the natural ease and the fullness of detail. He does not overlook a single trait that can be used for his picture. And he uses none in vain. If we are at first astonished at the learning of the speaker, we gradually perceive where she gained it all. The knowledge of mankind and the comic power manifested in this poem, the vivid truthfulness and the clear presentation of the story, are really wonderful. The *Wife of Bath* belongs to universal literature as one of its indestructible types.

The story of *January and May* reproduces the theme, with variations, on which everything in the *Wife of Bath* turns, viz., the dubious experiences of married life—the craft and wantonness of women. A Lombard knight, named January, an old sinner of a bachelor, when over sixty years of age, takes into his head a violent inclination to get married. He calls his friends together to discuss the case with them. This gives the poet the opportunity for a delicious dialogue, which might be considered as a model, where his sarcastic vein has full flow. But January, whose decision is fixed independently of any discussion, now begins to look around. His choice falls on a very young and pretty girl of low birth, and he informs his friends of his intention of marrying her. Nothing now remains to be done by the modest, well-intentioned Justinus, but to dispel the only scruple which still haunts old January, viz., the fear that he might lose eternal happiness by making for himself a paradise on earth. The marriage between the old fool and the young beauty, whose name is May, is celebrated with great pomp and loud rejoicings; and January indulges to his heart's content in the sweet intoxication of the honeymoon.

In the meantime, however, his happiness is threatened from his immediate surroundings. He has in his service a smart young page, named Damian, who, at first sight, falls deeply in love with his pretty mistress. Damian tells his love in a letter, which he manages with great cleverness to have conveyed to May—and this description of his love reminds us strongly of *Troilus*. The young

wife feels much sympathy for the unhappy youth, and sympathy develops into love. But it is a long time before the lovers succeed in deceiving the watchful eye of the jealous husband. At last, however, he becomes blind ; yet this only increases his jealousy ; but the lovers now find easy means of attaining the desired goal. January possessed a beautiful garden, surrounded by a high stone wall, and he himself carefully kept the key. Here there was a fountain by a laurel-tree, and to this spot Pluto, Proserpine, and their elfish train frequently repaired to hear music and songs. In summer the old husband was wont to walk about in the garden with his beautiful young spouse. One day Damian slipped in before them by means of a false key—having had everything carefully pre-arranged with May. They succeeded in their crafty and criminal plan, in which a pear-tree plays an important part. But Pluto and Proserpine were just then in the garden, and, enraged at the deceit of the faithless wife, the god restores old January's sight, that he may see his own disgrace. Proserpine, however, takes care, on her side, that the lady, caught in the act, may not be without her excuse : what she has done, she says, was perfectly innocent, and was only intended as a means of restoring her husband's eyesight, and, thank God, it has succeeded ! But as January emphatically disbelieves in the innocence of her action, she ascribes this to the imperfect nature of his cure : " If you could see clearly, you would say nothing of the sort ; you have only a glimmer, but no clear vision yet " ; as " He who awakes from his sleep cannot define an object sharply at once, nor see it clearly until he is properly come to his senses ; just so, he who receives his sight after being long blind cannot see at once as well as he who has had sight for some days. Until your eyes have been fairly restored many a sight may deceive you." Poor old January has to be satisfied, and rejoices in the restoration of his eyesight and in his beautiful, wise, and loving wife.

We do not know from what source Chaucer took this story.\* The mediæval fable, written in Latin distichs by a certain Adolphus in the year 1315, contains only the

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\* See Appendix.

catastrophe, and in a somewhat different form. It speaks of the blind man, of the strangely restored eyesight, the criminal couple, and the pear-tree, but not of Pluto or Proserpine, nor of the deliciously impudent turn of the imperfect effect of the cure. The last trait is also absent in an Italian romance, and in an old German poem, where the Saviour and Peter take the places of the two deities from the underworld. Chaucer may have used this Italian story, or perhaps a French fabliau now lost; but in any case he has unmistakably impressed the stamp of his own originality in the details of the execution, in the characterization of the motives. In *Griselda* he entered on the domain of the romance proper; in *January and May* he turned to that species in which his greatest strength lay, viz.: the highly seasoned, realistic comic romance, of which the most successful examples then written were the works of French *trouvères*, and Boccaccio's *Decamerone*. But Chaucer drives all his predecessors completely out of the field. His very first attempt is a masterpiece of the highest kind. The interest is well sustained; light and shade are interspersed with a master hand; retarding elements are brought in with great effect to heighten the suspense; the characters and situations are presented with the distinctness of the drama, and the whole story breathes a cheerful objectivity, a naïve sensuality and sly humor, united to a refined culture and highly developed art. The natural ease of the exposition—especially the many and somewhat comprehensive digressions, reflections, allusions, proverbs—reminds us strongly of the *Wife of Bath*, which was written at the same period.

While Chaucer was thus gradually rising to the summit of his art, a rival unexpectedly appeared in the person of his friend Gower. Gower was not indeed his equal, but yet as things stood he was, as a rival, by no means to be despised.

The "moral" poet, who had hitherto written only French and Latin verses, was not insensible to the growing popularity of Chaucer's English poetry. The thought of vying with his friend in his own domain must have especially occurred to him in reading the *Legende of Goode Women*. It was merely a rearrangement of old

materials ; the contents being drawn from old Latin authors ; while the plan and treatment exactly suited the prevalent mediæval taste and Gower's own style. Why should the author of the *Vox Clamantis* with his learning and his skill in form, not be able to write an English work as well, or even better, than Chaucer—a work that could be read alike by serious men and by the common crowd ?

The poet's own feelings were encouraged by a direct command from the king. It was still the honeymoon of Richard's personal government. Everybody was delighted with the moderation and peacefulness of the young monarch, whose genial affability was everywhere gaining him friends. Meeting the poet accidentally on the Thames, Richard invited him from his boat into the royal barge, and in conversation asked Gower to write something new, something that he himself might read.

What, now, should be the nature of this commanded book ? Gower had been entertaining the idea of writing a book

“ Whiche may be wisdom to the wise,  
And play to hem that list to play.”

And nothing seemed more appropriate for such an object than a collection of entertaining stories with moral reflections.

Literary taste was still moving on the same old lines. In the first half of the century Thomas Walleys (+1340), an English Dominican friar, had given a moral interpretation to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and his work was still popular. The *Gesta Romanorum* and the *Seven Wise Masters* were continuing their triumphant career through the world. Of the last collection there had been an English version\* in existence since the beginning of the century, which was altered from one form to another—in writing and in oral delivery—while new and independent versions likewise appeared. Such an independent version was made in Gower's time on the basis of a French original ; this French original must have

\* See the English edition of our first volume, pp. 262, 263, and also the Appendix to this volume.



been very similar to the source of the older English story. The *Gesta Romanorum*, having spread to the continent, were there augmented by the incorporation of material from the *Seven Wise Masters*, and were now copied and read and appropriated in England as much as ever.

This collection was well known to Gower, and he also knew the learned repertories of legendary or historic lore—such as Vincent of Beauvais's *Historic Mirror*, Godfrey of Viterbo's (1190) *Pantheon*, Isidorus, Casiodorus, Valerius Maximus, Justinus. He was as well acquainted with his Bible as with his Ovid, and a great part of the romance literature and many a chronicle of the Middle Ages had passed through his hands and his head.

All these works supplied him with interesting matter for his new book. He was content to borrow the leading ideas from his own *Vox Clamantis*. As in that work, so also in his new one, and in the same order, he gave a description of the troubled times, of the Five Ages of the World as mentioned in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and a discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins. He compressed, however, the two first points into a Prologue, while the Deadly Sins and their ramifications form the real pith of his book.

He borrowed the inner organization from Chaucer and Jean de Meung. As the hero of the story in the *Romance of the Rose* is a lover, and that lover the poet himself, so also in Gower's poem. Jean de Meung represents Genius as the Chaplain and Confessor of Nature; Gower calls Genius the priest of Venus, and the lover's confessions to him form the contents of the whole poem, which is therefore called *Confessio Amantis*. Among Chaucer's works the Prologue to the *Legende of Goode Women* is most to be considered. There the poet meets the angry god of love accompanied by the gentle Queen Alcestris; at the beginning of the *Confessio Amantis* the old, enamored Gower perceives the god—who is angry with him also—accompanied by Venus; she takes the poet's part. As Alcestris commands her protégé to write the legend, so Venus orders hers to make

his *Confession*; and in each case a poem is the result. At the end of the *Confessio Amantis* we are again forcibly reminded of Chaucer, sometimes of his *Legend*, sometimes of his *House of Fame*, or of other poems.

Taken as a whole, the *Confessio Amantis* bears a thoroughly mediæval—we might almost say, a monkish—character. The strange contradictions of Gower's nature and education appear in none of his works so plainly as in this. Poet and pedant, love-writer and moralist are continually at strife. This state is well illustrated by the character of the Confessor, who forgets at times his rôle of clergyman, but forgets more frequently his relation to Venus. Deep moral and religious reflections are mixed up with the subtleties of a refined love code, such as was laid down in the *Romance of the Rose*, with Ovid for a background. Besides, the orderly development of the plan is interrupted by a discussion of the Aristotelian-Arabian philosophy; and its doctrines of cosmology and physiology, grammar, logic and rhetoric, ethics, economics and politics, occupy one whole book out of the eight devoted to the entire poem. Gower here draws his information mainly from that compendious work, foisted on the Stagirite, which, under the name *Secretum Secretorum*, had an immense circulation in the Middle Ages, and was so often commented on, rewritten, and translated into several Western tongues.

The most attractive parts of the work are certainly its stories. In the scientific portion they are particularly well represented in the political section, but, indeed, they run through the whole work; every moral lecture of the Confessor, every definition of a sin and description of its consequences, is illustrated and corroborated by a story from ancient and modern times. But, as a rule, the story intended to impress a doctrine fits it as the fist does the eye! The application is often dragged in by the hair, while the living lesson of the story is unperceived by the poet. The feelings of the reader are sometimes still more offended by the author's dull ethical and æsthetical perception, which leads him to spin out immoral and questionable situations. We are completely at a loss to know what to think of the "moral" Gower's

logic, when, in the story of Canace, he blames indeed the rage of the father, but excuses the incest of the children on the ground of strong natural impulse.

In order to appreciate what is good in the *Confessio Amantis*, one must be able to give one's self up to abstractions, which will be much easier done in this case by the simple reader, who is interested only in the subject-matter, than by the educated and critical. We must take each story by itself, letting it have its unprejudiced effect, without troubling ourselves about the connection in which it appears. We must find our delight in the separate striking passages, which reveal the moralist, the satirist, or the practised historical writer, and in the few passages where a really poetic vein is struck, and overlook the barren tracts which lie between. Finally, we must acquire a taste for certain excellences of the style and versification, without regard to the contents.

It may be easily observed from Gower's verse and language that he has been in Chaucer's school. But the scholar is anything but an imitator; with the great model before his eyes, he sought and found his own style in a just knowledge of himself. In his chief work he employs the modest, short-rhymed couplet, instead of the decasyllabic measure, which required a higher flight; but he manages his measure very cleverly, and makes it more regular than any previous English poet, Chaucer included. It may be said that he handled the old traditional form of verse in the same way as his great contemporary did the new measure for which he procured admission into English poetry. Gower's diction is distinguished by its lightness and lucidity. It breathes a calm repose, which is communicated to the reader, and exercises the same effect upon the ear as the uniform babbling of a brook, which does not easily grow wearisome. We are very seldom surprised by any bold or unsuspected turn; we never feel raised from the ground, nor carried away to any higher sphere. What we hear is the homely, but cleverly worded chatter of an experienced man, fairly rounded off, sometimes striking, sometimes graceful, often comprehensive, but mostly colorless and tedious, weakening the impression of

good passages by the frequent repetition of similar thoughts.

The poet treats the material of his poems in many different ways. Sometimes he gives us only a short report, sometimes a prolix description. On the whole he relates clearly, rather vividly, and with a certain elegance; sometimes he can paint with wonderful distinctness. But he only seldom succeeds in bringing out the really poetic points of a story, except where this was already done in his original; and occasionally he even has the heart to give only a dry *résumé* of the most effective parts in the narrative of a predecessor. The stories of the *Legende of Goode Women*, and that of *Ceyx and Halcyone*, are all found again in the *Confessio Amantis*, as if to challenge a comparison with Chaucer. Here and there Gower borrows a trait directly from his friendly master; yet he generally takes his materials from the same sources as Chaucer, but quite independently, and nowhere does his manner appear so flat as when he is repeating ancient sagas; many later traditions he has reproduced with greater success. Among others, he succeeded fairly well with the story of *Apollonius of Tyre*, where he follows pretty closely the metrical rendering in Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon*; as the last and most detailed of all the stories in the *Confessio Amantis*, attention has been particularly directed to this one, and it has formed the standard for the estimation of Gower's talents.

Among all his stories, however, the palm does not belong to *Appollonius*, but to the tale of the *Knight Florent*. It treats of an old theme which seems to have a perennial attraction, for it has tempted more than one poet to a translation, not only in the Middle Ages, but also in modern times—I recall Voltaire and Bilderdyk. A young knight, who has forfeited his life, can only save himself by solving the riddle: "What is it that women most desire?" The answer is given him by a frightfully ugly old woman, viz., "the mastery in love." The knight thus saved his life, but he had given his promise to marry the ugly hag who supplied him with the answer. As a man of honor he keeps his word, and leads



the old witch home; but in the marriage-bed she is turned into a beautiful young lady. But the point of the story consists in this, that the knight owes his unexpected happiness to his submission to the will of his intelligent spouse.\* Gower tells his pretty fable in a really interesting manner, with more spirit and less dullness than is usual with him. We cannot, indeed, say how much he was here indebted to his immediate authority, since that is not known.

With all its merits and defects the *Confessio Amantis* was well calculated to impress Gower's contemporaries. It formed the first great collection of tales in the English language, far more comprehensive and varied than the *Seven Wise Masters*. Besides, it gave the concise wisdom of the *Secretum Secretorum* to the English public in a popular form. And then, the whole was the original work of an English poet.

But the poem represents no literary progress when compared with Chaucer's works; on the contrary, as we have seen, it shows a decided relapse into the Middle Ages. But the greater number of readers, learned and unlearned, were still entangled in the Middle Ages; and while people were delighted with Chaucer's art, they nevertheless gave themselves up with equal pleasure—and many with even greater pleasure—to the quiet enjoyment of a poem which contained in a cultured form the intellectual possessions of the age, without entertaining an idea of anything higher—which the age, indeed, did not possess.

## XII.

Had Chaucer not been entertaining plans for higher flights in poetry, Gower's proceedings would have been sufficient to incite him now to new and bolder efforts. The *Confessio Amantis*, which was still in course of composition, and had been prompted by Chaucer's own example (in that he could not be mistaken) and the

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\*According to one version, which we shall meet in Chaucer, the change is effected by his submission; according to another, which Gower follows, his submission makes the change permanent.



laurels which the moral poet, already famous for his French and Latin verses, was now beginning to pluck upon the English Parnassus by climbing up on Chaucer's shoulders—left our poet no repose. If he had hitherto hesitated in his plans, as soon as he had read one book of the new work he must have seen his way clearly; conscious of his own strength, and in a just appreciation of his powers, the idea must have ripened in his mind to produce a connected work of the same species, but of a very different kind and calibre.

It could not possibly occur to him to imitate the ground-plan of the *Confessio Amantis*, or poems like *Disciplina Clericalis*, or the *Seven Wise Masters*. He was roused rather to take up again the rivalry with Boccaccio, to which, indeed, his whole education seemed to spur him on as by a necessity. The *Decamerone*, though in the form of prose, was really a poetic production. It shows the free, creative impulse, unconfined by any pedantic mold, and unstunted in its effect by any miserable attempts to draw an edifying moral at whatever cost from an unpromising theme. Whatever practical aim it contained was confined almost exclusively to the headings of the different *Giornate*. Besides, people could breathe freely in the gay and unconventional society depicted in the story which serves as a framework to the others. We are introduced to a company of young gentlemen and ladies, who know the world and enjoy life, who are seeking only to amuse themselves and to forget the misery of the period by passing the time with music, poetry, and entertaining conversation.

Chaucer, however, did not intend to imitate the *Decamerone*, but, in his own manner, to surpass it. In spite of the variety of subjects treated in that book, there is, nevertheless, a great sameness of tone in most of the stories, which, in the long run, is almost wearisome, especially when joined to the elegant sameness of the diction. And although the different speakers are often individualized with great acuteness, yet they all belong to the same sphere of life, and are almost all of the same age—they are all young, fashionable, intellectual, with the same education and almost the same views.

A broader view of life, with richer resources and greater variety, was hovering before Chaucer's mind. As in *Palamon and Arcite* and in *Troilus*, the individuality of the poet and the genius of his nation asserted themselves in contrast to the Italian,—and in this case with much more energy and power than before, owing to the greater ripeness of his culture and his special incentive to the work.

Chaucer's thinking and writing had assumed a more decidedly national and popular tinge with his increasing age and larger experience of life. After having gone through the French, the Italian, and the Latin poetry, he was now more interested than ever in the modest productions of the English muse (partly from ethical and patriotic motives, partly also on æsthetical grounds), viz., in the satires, the romantic poems, and the popular songs. He watched political events with the deepest interest, and particularly the movements in social and ecclesiastical affairs, and the intellectual currents of his time. His sympathy with Wyclifism, and with the great reformer himself, had subsequently become more significant. He did not join the ranks of his disciples; he remained what he had been—a good Catholic, with occasional attacks of skepticism; a worldling, with deep, though often dormant, religious feelings. But the moral greatness of the reformer, and his pure zeal for the Christian life and doctrine which was still working in many of his followers, inspired Chaucer with the greatest respect, and quickened his perception of the abuses and the moral sores in the church and in society. The *Vision of Piers Plowman* must have had a similar effect upon him.

From influences and interests such as these was formed the great cosmopolitan ideal, which Chaucer was nourishing as an artistic fancy, as a kind of photographic picture of the English life of the time, of the morals and conditions of the different ranks of English society. As far as their abilities and tendencies permitted, the satirists had drawn such pictures of all classes. The reader has already seen in Langland's poem a picture by no means unpoetic, though somewhat dreamy and confused, especially at the beginning, where we have that "vision

of the field full of folk "; and there is no doubt but this made a deep impression upon Chaucer. Another point was perhaps still more decisive : when the English Boccaccio asked himself how he should manage to bring together within the compass of his work the very mixed society which he had to paint, the second *Vision of Piers Plowman* must have helped him on his way—especially that passage where repentant sinners, and people of the most different sorts, and of all classes, begin the pilgrimage to Saint Truth. But the domain of the possible is yet far from being exhausted. It is very probable, for example, that Chaucer may once have made a pilgrimage to Canterbury himself. Besides, Boccaccio's invention of a company fleeing from the plague is not very far from Chaucer's thought of a company returning their thanks, by means of a pilgrimage, for their happy recovery from an epidemic.\* Finally, a clever head is never at a loss for a happy idea.

Chaucer's plan was now formed in the following manner : A number of pilgrims, who are going to Thomas à Becket's tomb at Canterbury, meet in the Tabard Inn at Southwark, where they find the poet, who is likewise going, and who joins the party. The host also offers to go with them—on condition that the company try to shorten the journey by telling stories on the way to and from Canterbury. Everyone must take his part, with the exception of the host, who appropriates to himself the office of guide, governor, and judge. Whoever tells the best tale shall have a supper at the cost of all the rest on their return to the Tabard Inn.

This plan combined the advantages of the *Decamerone* with much in which that poem was deficient. The action had a definite object in view, and gave an opportunity for more variety and many delightful episodes. At the same time it offered, and even demanded, familiar intercourse among people who might otherwise never have met in all their lives.

The plan gradually took a more definite shape. We

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\* See General Prologue, v. 17 ff.

"The holy blisful martir for to seeke  
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seeke."

soon see the figures of the pilgrims coming into clearer outlines before the poet's eye, and representing as a body all the gradations of English society, with the exception of the very highest and the very lowest orders.

There is a valiant Knight, his mind filled with the ideals of his class ; he has sought battles and adventures in all lands, was unterrified in danger, but still mild and gentle and of maidenly modesty ; newly returned from a long campaign, he lays aside his mail, and, without changing his mail-marked military coat, he starts out on his good steed to join the pilgrimage. He is accompanied by his Son, a youth of twenty years, decked out in motley fashionable dress, fresh and full of life, courageous and hot in love ; he is well trained in every courtly art and exercise, modest and most affable. A single servant follows the Knight, a sturdy Yeoman, probably a forester, for he keeps his bow in good condition, bright and clean, like an experienced archer. As further representative of the gentry we find a wealthy Franklin, or Freeholder, a sanguine, elderly gentleman, of epicurean habits, much addicted to the pleasures of the table, and famous far and wide for his hospitality—an important and influential personage in his own county.

The church and religious life are represented by numerous types. The Prioress is an attractive figure, a gentle lady of elegant deportment and fine breeding, somewhat affected and rather too much bent on the observance of court etiquette ; on the whole, however, a child-like, innocent creature, with a thoroughly womanly grace and a most tender heart. She has along with her a nun as her "Chapelaine," and also a broad-breasted, strong-necked, red-cheeked priest.

Similar physical advantages characterize the two other priests of the company, who, for the rest, bring into strong relief the difference between the older corporations founded by St. Benedict and St. Maur and the later Mendicant order established in the thirteenth century. The Monk, who occupies an important position as the head of a dependency of his monastery, has only the one failing—he does not care for the rules of his order, gladly leaves the fasting and praying and working to



others, preferring to quit the dull walls of the cloister for the pleasures of the chase, which he passionately loves. He is a stout, portly gentleman, with bald head and rolling eyes; an experienced man of the world, with strong nerves, rather inclined to coarseness, yet of a manly reserve and honorable character, and thoroughly respectable—even if, according to our ideas, he failed in his calling. The Mendicant Friar, a pillar of his order, is distinguished for his many accomplishments. When he chooses, he also can play the high and stately gentleman, and on the bench he looks like a master or a pope. He tries to avoid all acquaintance with poor folk, beggars, lazars, and such rabble, but likes to associate with such as have something to lose. But how unrestricted is his acquaintance among these! And how he can succeed everywhere by his flattery and make himself beloved—by tavern-keepers and sellers of victuals, by rich freeholders, and especially by the women! How pleasant he is at the confession, and what an irresistible beggar! How prettily he can talk, and sing to the harp, and how well does his lisping become him—he had taken to it from pure wantonness! A luxurious and greedy character—very sly, active, and of great bodily strength.\*

The Sompnour is a repulsive personage. He is a sort of bailiff to the church court of his diocese. His fire-red face, all full of boils and pimples, his narrow eyes, black scabby brows, and scrubby beard, made the children sore afraid, and his power in the diocese was founded upon fear. He was possessed of the most reckless greed, was venal, cruel, hot-blooded, and lustful as a sparrow; well loved he garlic and onions and strong wine red as blood, and when drunk he would rant and cry like a madman, and bawl out in Latin the few phrases he had learned from some decree.

This unclean fellow is worthily followed by his friend the Pardoner, who has his wallet “brimful of pardons come from Rome all hot.” He possesses great powers of persuasion, and understands his business so well that, in a visit of one day to the country parish, he can rake in more money than the parson could get in two months.

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\* See Appendix.



He carried an old pillow-case, representing it as our Lady's veil, and caused some pigs' bones in a glass to be worshiped as holy relics; an unmannerly clown he was, beardless, goggle-eyed like a hare; his voice was like a goat's, and he was always admiring his long, thin, flaxen hair.

The professional satirists were accustomed to show only the shady side of the clerical life and church organization, but Chaucer shows the brighter side as well. His tender-hearted, dainty Prioress calls forth our kindly sympathy, even if she should also force our smile. Thoroughly earnest and estimable is another of his characters—the Parson. He represents the ideal priest whom Wyclif had before his mind, and strove himself to realize.\* he is poor, simple, loving, self-sacrificing, patient, and at the same time learned, intelligent, zealous, bold, and “Christ's lore and His apostles' twelve he taught, but first he followed it himself.”

Of the learned classes we meet an Oxford Scholar, a Lawyer, and a Physician. The first is an enthusiastic student of science, passionately fond of books, and despising all things else; although he be a philosopher he has but little gold yet in his coffer, and would pray zealously for the souls of them that would give him wherewith to study; in appearance he was hollow-eyed and lean, and in a threadbare cloak he rode a skinny jade, “for he had gotten him as yet no benefice, and he despised any worldly office.” Often occupied with his own thoughts even in society, “not a word spake he more than was need, and that was said in form, short and quick, and full of high sentence.” But this quiet, diffident character is not without a touch of playful irony. The Lawyer, “a Sergeant of Law,” is a wise and wary gentleman of uncommon learning and experience, with an air “of great reverence”; much respected, very busy, “and yet he seemed busier than he was.” Of fees and robes he had many a one from his large practice, and he was not too conscientious in his business. His dress was of an elegant simplicity. The Physician also understands his profession excellently. He knows all the learned authors

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\* See Appendix.

on his subject, and practices astrology and natural magic with success upon his patients. There is a good understanding between him and the apothecaries, for their mutual benefit. He has made good capital out of the pestilence. "His study is but little on the Bible;" he lives moderately, but well, and keeps his money well in mind, "For gold in physic is a cordial, therefore, he loved gold in special."

To this group also belongs, in a certain sense, the Manciple, a steward or factor of a temple where lawyers boarded. He is a genteel and clever fellow, who, in buying of victuals, whether for payment or on credit, can always do a good business, and is able to fool all the thirty or more learned gentlemen whom he serves.

Trade and Commerce are represented by numerous types, though sometimes not very prominent ones. First of all "a Merchant there was with a forked beard," in motley dress, "and on his head a beaver hat of Flanders make," "his boots clasped neatly" on his feet; a portly gentleman, weighty and solemn in his words and looks, clever on 'Change, and most adroit in managing his affairs. People were so impressed by his steady manner that no one ever suspected he was in debt. There is also a weather-beaten sunburnt Shipman, who knows all the havens "from Gothland to the Cape of Finisterre," and every creek in Brittany and Spain; he is a skillful sailor, somewhat rough, with a not very tender conscience; remorseless to conquered foes, and too much inclined to make close acquaintance with the Bordeaux wines in the ship, of which he had many a draught when the merchant slept. Five honest Mechanics: a Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer, and a Tapestry-maker, all belong to the same fraternity, and were well clad in the same livery; full fresh and new were their clothes, girdles, pouches, and silver-mounted daggers. Each of them was fit to be an alderman, for they had goods and chattels enough, and their wives would have been well pleased with it—for "It is full fair to be ycleped 'Madam,'" and then how nice to have the privilege of always going first up the church steps, with a mantle carried like a queen's. These

wealthy burgesses had with them their own cook, quite an accomplished fellow at his art. But great pity it was that he had an ulcer on his shin, for he made *blanc manger* with the best.

The Miller is a characteristic figure—a thick-set, broad-shouldered fellow, with great bones and muscles, a broad beard, red as a fox, and his mouth wide as a fireplace. Right on the top of his nose was a wart, and thereon grew “a tuft of hairs, red as the bristles of a sow’s ears.” “He could steal corn cleverly, and at wrestling he always bore away the prize.” A rough customer he was, often drunk and swaggering and telling ribald tales—and he could blow the bagpipe well.

The Reeve, or Sheriff, is land-steward on the estate of a lord, and had learned the carpenter’s trade in his youth. He is shrewd, greedy, and looks closely after things; is good at accounts, feared by his subordinates, but stands in high favor with his lordship, at whose expense he is already rich, but who is placed under obligations by occasional presents and loans. He has long since well feathered his nest, but continues quietly at his lucrative post. Great rivalry exists between him and the Miller, which is accentuated by the contrast in their personal characters. The Reeve is choleric in temper, but is quite as reserved and modest as the Miller is extravagant, and generally as laconic as the latter is loquacious. The contrast is also seen in their exteriors—the Reeve is a slender man, with long lean legs, smooth-shaven chin, and short-cut hair.

And now the Plowman! In choosing a representative for this class, Chaucer allowed himself to be guided by Langland’s inspiration, just as the Parson shows the influence of Wyclif. The one is brother in the flesh to the other, and also belongs to the same spiritual family. The Plowman represents the Christian ideal among the peasants just as purely as the Parson does among the clergy; he follows faithfully the commands of Christ—above all, the command of brotherly love.

The list of Pilgrims is not yet exhausted. Chaucer did not neglect to send his “Wife of Bath” upon the Pilgrimage, for which she was most excellently suited.

We should also not forget that the poet himself was among them. Two other personages join the company in the course of the journey, and one of them remains definitely with the party and also relates a story.

The Host presides, as conductor and judge, over these story-telling pilgrims. He is a handsome, portly man, well built, and of a prudent, manly disposition, frank and affable, equally disposed to keen activity or pleasant enjoyment. He attends well to his guests, but never forgets his own interests. He is very anxious to keep the company gay and entertaining on the journey, and to joke harmlessly, though sometimes coarsely, with his guests, and even occasionally at their expense, but never losing sight of the differences in person and rank. Above all he is very careful to prevent quarreling among the pilgrims, or to settle disputes that may have arisen. At home he has a wife with a most violent temper, easily angered, and absolutely reckless in her rage. It looks as if she leads the Host a very bitter life. We may well believe, however, that such a man is able to manage her. At any rate, his married life has not robbed him of his good-humor or portliness.

This type of a sturdy, well-to-do burgess, at a time when England still deserved the name of "Merry England," was excellently fitted to play the part of the chorus in the varied drama of the procession to Canterbury. He represents most perfectly the magnanimous toleration, the serene benevolence, the easy and humane disposition which lend such a refreshing effect to Chaucer's magnificent poem.

But we are only occupied as yet with the plan or outline of the *Canterbury Tales*. All these pilgrims on whom the poet looked, with all the prejudices, habits, virtues, vices of their age and sex and station, and almost all of them with their individual peculiarities, excellences, and failings, were now to be put dramatically upon the scene, and in their exterior appearance as in their inmost hearts to be placed tangible and living before the reader's eye—all characterized by their language and deportment in unconstrained intercourse and conversation with each other, and not less characterized by the matter or the



manner of their stories, or by the way in which the one received the other's tale.

The revelation of the characters of these mediæval pilgrims, however, is not the only object of these Tales. Their object is of far wider reach. While each is in itself a finished work of art, they are intended, taken altogether, to complete that universal picture which the poet had in mind, viz.: a picture at once of the real life of mediæval society, especially of English society, and a reproduction, in a higher and condensed form, of that ideal world which hovers over this reality as its spiritual reflection. Hence, on the one hand, the variety of the characters introduced, with their different situations and ways of life; and, on the other hand, the universality in selecting the subjects and the forms of expression, the diversity in tendency, character, and style of the separate stories. As far as the compass of the work and the artistic designs of the poet admit, the whole of mediæval literature comes to expression in these Tales, in different forms of verse, and also in prose; in tragic, elegiac, didactic, romantic, ironic, satiric, comic, and tragic-comic style; in the specific forms of minstrelsy and the chivalrous romances, the fabliau, the lay, the legend, the legendary epic saga, the animal-epic, with mythology, history, moral allegory, and sermon.

Such was the idea the poet had conceived in his own mind, partly unconsciously, and partly as a developed conscious plan.

No doubt the plan was widened during the first stages of its execution. But the time came when Chaucer must have seen that the realization of his grand design in its entire compass could scarcely be permitted to him here. In the glory of his conception he intended each of his pilgrims to relate no fewer than four Tales—two upon the road to Canterbury, and two more on the journey home.\*

Afterwards, it seems, he thought half this number must suffice. And even the half of this half was never completed. All that is handed down to us of the Canterbury Tales appears to refer to the journey out, with

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\* See Appendix.



perhaps one exception. Six or seven of the pilgrims never speak at all. From the others we have only one Tale each, and two of them are unfinished; indeed, one of them is broken off at the beginning.\* Some Tales, which had been written previously, or which received a different place in the work from that originally intended for them, have not received the alterations required for their new position. The connective narrative of the procession has many breaks, and incongruities are found throughout the whole work.

As soon as the plan was finished in its main outlines, the poet evidently worked at it by fits and starts. His artistic sense, and occasionally strong but intermittent impulses, often forced different claims upon him at one and the same time, and thus the uniform progress of the work became impossible. His art demanded variations, parallelisms, contrasts, in short, suitable grouping; his occasional impulses forced him, at a given moment, to work out certain characters and situations, to treat of this subject or of that, and above all to bring one or other of his pilgrims into action—for this, indeed, was his predominant and all-propelling motive. The consequence was that he began or left off almost anywhere, just as it suited him, or, in other words, he sometimes elaborated pieces with only a vague idea of their reference to the whole, sometimes again with a precise knowledge of their application. But as a finished picture never corresponds entirely to the original design, however great the artist, so was it here with Chaucer; the picture, hovering before his mental eye, so comprehensive in its plan, and so often interrupted in its execution, or made in separate pieces, was necessarily deranged and modified in many points, notwithstanding its bold, decisive outlines. And this explains the state in which we find the Canterbury Tales.

This vast work does not appear to us as one immense torso, but as a series of fragments. The different order

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\* No Tales are told by the five Mechanics or the Ploughman. For the Knight's Servant see further, chap. xiv. Chaucer alone relates more than one Tale, viz., the intentional fragment of Sir Thopas and Melibœus and Prudentia. The unfinished Tales are the Cook's (who, as we shall see, has nothing to do with Gamelyn) and the Squire's.

of these fragments in the various groups of manuscript, and partly in certain codices, is of great interest—except where this order is due to purely secondary causes. We thus learn that not only were some fragmentary pieces of the work repeatedly copied—edited, as it were—in Chaucer's lifetime, but we are also able to trace in some cases changes in the poet's plans. But putting all the traditions together, it was evident that the poet was prevented from giving the final arrangement and polishing touch to what he had written. None of the manuscripts gives the pieces in a succession which could have suited Chaucer's intentions; and no criticism has succeeded in making out anything like a sound and satisfactory arrangement.\* And even the latest ingenious and applauded attempt of this kind was foredoomed to failure (except by violent and arbitrary proceedings) from the impossibility of reconciling contradictions which the poet did not remove.

We shall consider the fragments therefore in the order in which they are given in the most careful of the older editions. However little this order may correspond to the final views of the poet in the arrangement of his work, it is at least recommendable on the ground that it offers us what we know upon the whole to have been the chronological order in which the separate pieces† received their present form.

### XIII.

The first fragment, which reveals in every line the overflowing joy of a creative impulse, is distinguished by strongly elaborated contrasts in broad but simple outlines, and by the most careful management of characteristic details which the nature of one and the same verse will admit. At the beginning stands the general Prologue. This is a little masterpiece in itself, and gives us a direct intimation of the different motives which

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\* See Appendix.

† We mean the separate fragments, each considered as a unit in itself, but not necessarily the pieces of which these fragments are made up.

are afterward worked out, or at least foreshadows their character. The Prologue consists of three parts of very unequal length : A short exordium, which breathes the free and wandering spirit of the spring, "when people long to go on pilgrimage," brings us quickly to the second and important part. Here the persons of the pilgrims to be placed upon the scene are brought picturesquely before our eyes. This portion has at all times called forth the special admiration of readers and critics, and to a superficial eye it might seem well fitted to prove the arbitrary character of the sharp distinction drawn by Lessing between poetry and the plastic art. But whoever studies it more closely will find that a happy instinct almost always guided Chaucer to seize the means best adapted to his art. He relates, rather than describes ; he lingers longer on the actions and characters of his heroes than on their outward appearance ; and even where he wishes to draw special attention to the external appearance the individual traits have essentially a symbolical meaning, and are intended as an interpretation of the whole character and manner of the man. Through the imagination he thus appeals to the understanding, and through the understanding again to the imagination. We thus receive in the end such an exact idea of the men he is describing, that we can almost see them bodily before us, although it is only by their actions we should recognize them again in real life. The poet's intuition and powers of observation are quite as wonderful as the art by which he lets his characters grow gradually before our eyes : while appearing to go at haphazard from one trait to another, from something external to something essential, from some general statement to a particular example, or *vice versa*, he nevertheless proceeds with the very greatest sureness. This freedom of treatment, with its frequent alterations, allows the poet easily to avoid shoals which might have been most dangerous to his venture, viz., the wearying and blunting of his readers. The order in which the different figures are introduced also helps to keep the mind awake. Regard for the connection of things that belong together is here crossed by the effort to keep things of

the same sort apart, and to work by contrasts. Hence the Physician is separated from the Lawyer, the Sompnour from the Friar; while the Student is placed immediately after the Merchant, and the Parson after the Wife of Bath. Hence the interruption of the list of individual figures by the summary treatment of the group of Mechanics, as well as the sharp break, or breathing-space, before the description of the final group—the Miller, the Manciple, the Reeve, the Sompnour, the Pardoner.

By what varied means does Chaucer round off his individual figures! Sometimes by seriousness, sometimes by waggishness, now by gentle irony, then by reckless satire, and yet he himself still remains the same. Nowhere does the poet renounce his wide human sympathies, his cheerful benevolence, his amiable good-humor. And yet he has at his disposition ideas and means of expression which work with lightning speed. How excellent are the concluding lines in the picture of the Friar:

Somewhat he lipped, for his wantonnesse,  
To make his Englissh sweete upon his tonge;  
And in his harping, whan that he had songe,  
His yen twinkled in his heed aright,  
As doon the sterres in the frosty night.

How clearly and distinctly is the hunting Monk presented, and how witty is the association of ideas called forth by the ringing of the bells hanging to his bridle:

A Monk there was, a fair for the maistrye,  
An outrydere, that lovede venerye,  
A manly man, to been an abbot able.  
Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable:  
And whan he rood, men mighte his brydel heere  
Ginglen in a whistlinge wynd as cleere,  
And eek as loude, as dooth the chapel belle,  
Ther as this lord was keepere of the selle.

The final traits in the picture of the economical, suspicious Reeve are also of great effect:

Tukked he was, as is a frère, aboute,  
And evere he rood the hindreste of our route.

But how many similar touches might be added!  
The last part of the Prologue is more long and ample



than the first part, and begins with a quieting address from the poet to the reader : we must excuse, he says, the realism of his stories, and not impute it as his fault if he lets his different characters speak and act in the way they do. Whoever tells a story after another is bound to give it word for word as he heard it, "as nigh as ever he can," even with all its coarseness and ribaldry. We are then introduced to the pleasures of the old English tavern life. The Host is briefly described and immediately set in action. And thus the plan of the Canterbury Tales is laid bare. After this the pilgrimage is started at once and the first Tale begins.

As the characteristic figure of the Knight stands at the head of the portraits in the Prologue, it is also now his lot to tell the first Tale. His Tale is already known to us. The romantic, sentimental story of Palamon and Arcite, with the great tournament as its climax, seems as if made for the Knight. In recasting his epic into the form of a tale, Chaucer took good care to give his story a coloring in harmony with the teller and his situation. Only a few short additions were required.

But even with all the condensation it received, the story is still of unusual length, and seems like a *pièce de résistance*. Placed at the beginning of the whole series, this pregnant Tale gives us a good prepossession in favor of the importance of the rest.

The Miller and the Reeve are placed in sharp contrast to the Knight, whom they immediately follow ; *i. e.*, after the tragi-comic follows the extravagant comedy bordering on the satyr-play. The Miller is so drunken that he can scarcely sit upright in his saddle, and in this condition his rude, presumptuous, and provoking manner, and his preference for bawdy stories, become only too plain. At the same time the rivalry of their guilds, and the personal contrasts between him and the Reeve-Carpenter, are brought out. When irritated by the Miller, the Reeve's choleric temper makes him lay aside his usual laconic style ; and, in giving vent to his vexation, we see how he also delights in bawdy stories, and how shallow was the varnish of the moral reflections which suited his age.



The Tales of both are evidently written for the connection in which they appear. The subject of the Miller's Tale is a hoax or practical joke : how an Oxford student dupes a carpenter, and also plays a trick on an amorous parish clerk, who pays him back with interest. On the other hand the Reeve relates how two Cambridge students are revenged upon a sly old thievish Miller who tried to cheat them of their meal. Both stories are unfortunately of such a nature as to be unsuited for recital to present-day readers. It is therefore impossible here to do proper justice to the poet's art. The source of the Miller's Tale is unknown, although in German and Italian literature kindred stories may be found, and the low obscenity at the end of the story survives even to our day. The source of the Reeve's Tale was probably a French fabliau, the contents of which can be learned approximately from similar versions still extant.\* Possibly the English poet showed his own originality much more boldly in the first Tale than in the second. There is manifested in both a talent for invention, characterization, and motives, and a comic power such as were never again attained in this class. The greatest masters in the farcical romances cannot measure swords with Chaucer. What is offensive in the subject is almost entirely destroyed by the art of telling it. All the characters are distinct, plastic, living, and we are made quite familiar with their whole surroundings, and the scene in which they move. The local coloring, which is laid on very strongly, gives the whole a special charm. We feel almost at home in the room of the Oxford student or in the mill at Trumpington, and the Yorkshire dialect spoken by the two Cambridge scholars deepens the impression of truth, and makes the illusion complete ; while the contrast between their simple, homely characters and their waggishness is very strikingly marked. The intrigue is carried out and elucidated in both Tales in a masterly manner ; the chief passages are perfectly dramatic in their directness and intellectual force. Everything is so well prepared

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\* See Appendix.

for the catastrophe that we irresistibly almost split our sides with laughter. But perhaps the greatest admiration is due to the tact with which Chaucer here keeps his own personality completely in the background. The picture is complete even to the smallest detail; there is, however, not an observation, metaphor, simile, employed, but what might have come naturally from the Miller or the Reeve, as soon as we admit the idealization of such persons—which is, indeed, an inalienable right of poetry. Chaucer's art appears in these Tales at its climax. He is here unmistakably in his proper element. Throughout the whole story there is a gay sensuality, an innate delight in the things of the world, a sparkling vitality breaking out into wantonness.

When the Reeve has finished his Tale, the Cook is loud in its praise, and, still shaking with laughter, he also now offers to relate a pretty little farce which took place in London, his native town. The Host gives him leave to begin, and warns him to act well his part, at the same time allowing himself to utter a few taunts at the way in which the Cook plies his trade. The Cook begins his Tale in the best of humor, and with a promise to pay back the Host for his taunts in due time.\* It treats of a licentious, gay apprentice to a provision merchant, who is finally dismissed from his master's service, and then sends back his bed and clothes to the house of a dissolute companion and his still more dissolute wife. At this point the story breaks off, and we can only say that it probably belongs in a general way to the same class as the two preceding ones, or would even perhaps have surpassed them in point of respectability!

We can thoroughly understand why Chaucer did not continue this piece when he returned to his writing after having had his attention called off by some external circumstances. To have three stories of the same stamp following each other was too much for the reader. On second thoughts it must have struck the poet that the Cook's Tale should occupy some other place. For the

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\* He promises a story about a Host; not now but on some other occasion which he hoped to find during the Pilgrimage.

present, however, other pilgrims and new stories were pressing more eagerly upon him. He allowed what was written to remain in the mean time as it was, began another fragment, and never went back to make the changes he had recognized as necessary.\*

The second fragment sets the Serjeant of Law upon the scene. His Tale treats of the strange fortunes of Custance (Constance), the Roman Emperor's daughter, in whose form wifely innocence is glorified. Though continually pursued by hatred, slander, and sensual lust, she is preserved in all her trials and dangers by a higher power; twice cast adrift upon the open sea, she is kept safe above the raging waves and led at last into the haven of assured happiness. The fable is closely related to the contents of other mediæval poems, and seems to have been developed out of an Old English saga which was probably completed within Christian times. But the Christian element was evidently pretty strong in the versions of the story used by Chaucer. The heroine here appears almost a personification of Christianity itself, such as it comes to heathen nations, is maligned and persecuted, yet, in the strength of its Founder, endures in patience and finally remains victorious. Chaucer's source was the same as that from which Gower also drew the story for his *Confessio Amantis*, viz., The Universal Chronicle, written in Anglo-Norman at the beginning of the reign of Edward III., by the Dominican Nicholas Trivet. Trivet made himself a name as a prolific author, especially in Latin, on theological, philosophical, historical, and also on purely literary subjects. It is instructive to compare the story of Constance in the two English poets with their original. Both follow Trivet in all essentials, and therefore only deviate from each other in unimportant points; in a few cases Gower's example may, indeed, have influenced Chaucer. So much the greater is the contrast in the representation of the two rival poets—the contrast between the insipid manner of Gower and the really poetic treatment of Chaucer, who brings out the true effect of the touching parts of the

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\* For the Tale of Gamelyn, see below, chapter xiv.

story in energetic stanzas, and gives real expression to his own sentiments, for he has the subject thoroughly at heart. The beautiful simile in the following stanza \* has been often remarked :

Have ye not seen sometime a palë face  
Among a press of him that hath been lad  
Toward his deeth, where as he getteth no grace?  
And such a colour in his face hath had,  
Men mighten know him that was so bestad  
Amongës all the faces in that rout?  
So stands Custance and looketh here about.

Here again we cannot help thinking of Chaucer's own experience of the year 1388.

The story of Constance is probably one of the earliest parts of the *Canterbury Tales* conceived with special reference to the whole collection. The learned rhetorical ornamentation which so plainly marks the style, and the somewhat polemical discussion with previous authors about unimportant details,† leads us to conjecture that the poet first wrote this Tale with the intention of relating it himself upon the journey. This supposition finds special support in the strange prologue, with its pathetic and uncalled-for description of trials of poverty. We can easily imagine Chaucer speaking in this way from his own personal experience ; but why should the Lawyer speak so, and what association of ideas brings him to this theme ?

It was a very delicate question for the poet to give himself a place in the *Canterbury Tales*. If it was originally his intention to take a serious part, at a later stage of his work it rightly appeared to him that there would be more point and tact in playing an ironical game. He therefore assigns to other characters, who should, as it were, take his place, his own acknowledged attributes, his learning, energy, and colored rhetorical style. He naturally chose these representatives from the liberal professions and the learned class. One of these is the Lawyer. The pathos of the story of Constance seemed well adapted to the ostensible dignity of the learned

\* Man of Lawe's Tale, l. 547 ff., *Canterbury Tales*, l. 5065 ff.

† Verses 988 ff. hit Trivet and Gower equally ; while the remark in verse 911 ff. must refer to some unknown author, if it is not an error of Chaucer's.



jurist ; and even the Prologue was at least not contrary to the nature of the man, who would have had no objection to a reversal of the well-known proverb "poverty is no disgrace," etc. Now, see in what an interesting way the Serjeant of Law is introduced by the poet. On the host's command to relate a story, he alleges, in the first place, his willingness, but with all the reservations of a Lawyer ; then follow his well-known excuses ; and these are given in a form which leaves a deep impression of his own learning upon his hearers, and shows the reader Chaucer's immense productiveness. "I cannot," says the Lawyer, "tell any thrifty tale just now, except what Chaucer (although no master in meters and rhymes) has already told in such English as he can, as is well known. In his youth he wrote of Ceyx and Halcyone, and, since then, of all those noble women, and also of those lovers. Whoever will take up his large volume, called the Saints' Legend of Cupid, may there see the wide wounds of Lucrece and Thisbe of Babylon ; Dido's sword drawn for the false Æneas ; Phyllis turned to a tree for her Demophoön ; the Complaint of Dione and of Hermione, of Ariadne, and of Hypsipyle—the barren island standing in the sea—Leander drowned for his fair Hero ; the tears of Helen ; the woes of Briseis and of Laodamia ; thy cruelty, queen Medea, hanging thy little children by the neck for the sake of Jason, that was so false in love. O Hypermnestra, Penelope, Alcestis, your womanly virtue he commendeth among the best !"

If Chaucer wished to be considered here merely as a poetic copier of ancient fables, the situation and character of the speaker in this case would be simple and sufficient vouchers. We can scarcely fail, however, to recognize a side glance at Gower, who had been stimulated to enter into competition with his friend Chaucer by the work on the *Legende of Goode Women*, to which a strong prominence is here given, and of which, as already said, certain chapters are here referred to—chapters that have not been preserved and that presumably were never written. In what follows, the reference to his rival Gower is made very plain, and in a way which shows that the old friendship of the two poets was now somewhat



cooled, or at least that there was little wish on Chaucer's side to increase it. With all his unaffected worldliness and wantonness, Chaucer's muse always kept within definite bounds, and he cannot here refrain from drawing attention to a peculiar though not unusual contradiction in the learned and pious poet, who liked to pose as a moral preacher, and yet at times to dilate upon immoral and even repulsive themes with so much delight. Chaucer makes the Lawyer adduce some horrible examples of this sort from the *Confessio Amantis* with the strongest disapproval; *e. g.*, "but certainly he (Chaucer) writeth not a word of that wicked example of Canace, that loved her own brother sinfully; to all such accursed stories I say, *Fy*; nor of Apollonius of Tyre, how that the cursed King Antiochus dishonored his own daughter. . . . Therefore he (Chaucer), with full deliberation, never would write in any of his works of such unnatural abominations." The indignation here expressed was undoubtedly the poet's serious opinion, and testifies to his healthy moral sentiment. After the literary and moral controversy, the poetic contest begins. The Lawyer takes Chaucer's place, and even hints at the end of his Introduction, that he will relate\* in prose a subject formerly treated poetically by the poet; he gives the history of Constance, which, as already remarked, Gower had also rendered in his *Confessio Amantis*—but in what a different way!

At the end of the Lawyer's story is attached the following passage:

Our Host stood up in his stirrups anon and said: "Good men, hearken all; this was a thrifty tale for the nonce. Sir Parish Priest," quoth he, "by God's bones, tell us now a tale, as you formerly promised. I see well, by God's glory, that you learned men understand these things excellently." The Parson answered, "Benedicite! what aileth the man that he swears so sinfully?" Our Host replied, "O Jankin, are you there? I smell a Lollard in the wind," quoth he. "Now good men," said our Host, "hear me. Wait, by God's Holy Passion, we shall have a sermon. This Lollard here will preach us something." "Nay, by my father's soul, that he

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\* Verses 90-96. It may be well doubted whether Chaucer ever intended to turn his poem into prose for the object mentioned. But we have seen how far the Lawyer here follows the poet's steps.

shall not," said the \* \* \*, "here he shall not preach, neither homily nor sermon; we all believe in the great God," said he, "he might sow some difficulty, or spring cockle in our corn. And, therefore, Host, I warn thee beforehand, my jolly body shall tell you a tale, and I shall clink you so merry a bell that I shall waken all this company. But it shall not be of philosophy, nor of physic, nor quaint law terms. There is but little Latin in my maw."

Who, now, is this bold fellow, who forces himself into the conversation and will not listen to the pious Parson, and seems to be as keen in scenting heretics as he is loose in morals? There is no doubt but Chaucer had the Sompnour here in view; but only a few of the MSS. have kept the original word in the place we have left open above (marked \* \* \* ).\* The poet himself afterwards gave up the intention of bringing the Sompnour here so soon upon the scene. On more than one occasion in the course of his work he probably thought of placing the Lawyer's Tale in some other connection; but his final ideas on the point were never definitely expressed. And so the above short fragment was left as it were hovering in the air, and in the most careful of the old editions of the Canterbury Tales it was simply suppressed.

In the altered plan, however, the poet brought the Sompnour, the Mendicant Friar, and the Wife of Bath upon the scene in the same group—a group distinguished by vivid characteristics and stirring action, and uniting drastic satire with a high art of presentation. The fragment begins with the "Confessions" of the Wife of Bath, which start abruptly, and are then closely and effectively united to the action of the pilgrimage by the intercalation of a short dialogue and an appended scene. The dialogue takes place between the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner. She has scarcely finished with her introductory expectorations, and the laying down of her theories, when,

Up start the Pardoner, and began :  
 "Now Dame," quod he, "by God, and by Saint John,  
 Ye be a noble preacher in this case.  
 I was about to wed a wife, alas !  
 What ? should I bie<sup>1</sup> it on my flesh so dear ?

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\* See Appendix.

Yet had I lever wed no wife to-year."  
 "Abide," quod she, "my tale is not begun,  
 Nay thou shall drinken of another tun  
 Ere that I go, shall savour worse than all,  
 And when that I have told thee forth my tale  
 Of Tribulation in marriage,  
 Of which I am expert in all my age  
 (This is to say myself have been the whip),  
 Then may'st thou choosen whether thou wilt sip  
 Of thilke tunnē, that I shall abroach.<sup>2</sup>  
 Beware of it ere thou too nigh approach,  
 For I shall tell ensamples more than ten;]  
 Whoso that n'll beware by other men  
 By him shall other men corrected be.  
 These same wordēs writeth Ptolemy,  
 Read in his Almagest, and take it there."  
 "Dame, I would pray you, if your will it were,"  
 Saidē this Pardoner, "as ye began  
 Tell forth your tale, and spareth for no man,  
 And teacheth us young men of your practique."  
 "Gladly," quod she, "since that it may you like  
 But that I pray to all this company,  
 If that I speak after my fantasy,  
 As taketh not a grief of that I say,  
 For mine intent is not but for to play." \*

<sup>1</sup> Suffer.

<sup>2</sup> Broach.

In order to perceive the full force of the jovial humor in this *intermezzo* we have to figure to ourselves the personal appearance of the two speakers: the flax-haired, beardless Pardoner, with his goat-like voice, and the snug, red-cheeked townswoman, with her bold look and her quick, glib tongue. The episode was probably composed before the appended scene which we have yet to consider, and might belong to that stage of the Canterbury Tales where the fabliau of the monk Don John was put into the mouth of the Wife of Bath as a "Tale" (her "confessions" come only as a Preamble). Chaucer afterwards used up the fabliau in another connection for another character.† The fact is, the scene appended at the end was itself written for the final edition of the fragment, and refers as much to the traditional Tale of the Wife of Bath as to the Tales of the Mendicant Friar and the Sompnour.

\* Preamble to the Wyf of Bath's Tale, l. 163-192; Tyrwhitt, Canterbury Tales, l. 5745-5774. See Appendix.  
 † I. e., The Shipman's Tale. See Appendix.

There is a similar (but much sharper) contrast between the Mendicant Friar and the Sompnour to that between the Reeve and the Miller. In draining the common people of their money, both show the keenest rivalry. The Friar attains his end by his flattery and clever conversation, and the Sompnour by his reckless proceedings and brutal threats. Their mutual hatred breaks out on the first opportunity into open strife, and it is naturally the Sompnour who begins the fray. A remark made laughingly at the Confessions of the Wife of Bath, by the Frere, viz.: that it was a long prologue to her Tale, causes his rival to complain loudly of the shamelessness and obtrusive intermeddling of the Friars, who stick their noses into everybody's business like flies round every dish; the Friar, he says, should keep quiet and not disturb the pleasure of the company by his interruptions.\* The Friar takes up the glove: "Yea, wilt thou so, Sir Sompnour? Now, by my faith, I shall, ere that I go, tell of a Sompnour a tale or two, that all the people here shall laugh at him." The Sompnour threatens the other still worse. And it requires the decided command of the Host to bring about a peace and to allow the Wife of Bath to go on. Thus we are prepared for the further contents of the fragment.

The Tale of the Wife of Bath treats of the same subject as Gower had presented in his story of Florent, but is drawn from a source in some respects different. We saw how Gower here struck a better key than usual, and we may add that the version he adopted had many happy motives which were absent in Chaucer's. Nevertheless it is in Chaucer's racy and poetic narrative, so exquisitely planned, that the whole spirit of the story really first appears. And the idea that women's greatest wish is to have the mastery, as well as the practical justification of that wish in the development of the story itself, is excel-

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\* Lo, goode men, a flie and eek a frere  
 Woln falle in every disshè and matere  
 What spekst thou of perambulacioun?  
 What? amble or trot; or pees, or go sit doun;  
 Thou lettest oure disport in this matere.

(Preamble to the Wyf of Bathe, l. 835-839.)

perambulacioun (l. 837) refers to the "preamble" used by the Friar, and is misunderstood by the Sompnour.

lently suited to the character of the speaker, while subject and treatment abound in that sensual excitement which are in proper keeping with her lustful nature. The thoroughly sound moral of the long sermon given by the wise old woman, before her metamorphosis, to her young, unwilling husband, comes, indeed, more from the heart of the poet than from the Wife of Bath ; nevertheless, we can excuse this naïve tendency to the didactic quite as easily in Chaucer as in Shakspeare ; and we are glad of his elucidation showing that true nobility consists in virtue, and that poverty and age receive their due honor. Besides, the sermon is absolutely required by the situation, and its form, at least, is quite in harmony with the nature of the speaker ; it forms a necessary element in the development of the story, which it thus raises into a higher sphere. The beginning of the tale is excellent, and is spiced with the choicest malice ; it prepares us for the fairy elements in the action, which is placed in the time of King Arthur. "In Arthur's days this land was filled everywhere with elves and fairies ; but elves are now no longer to be seen. This has been brought about by the great charity and prayers and blessings of the holy friars, who search every district and every stream, as thick as motes in the sunbeam. Where formerly an elf was wont to walk, there walketh now the limiter\* himself, saying his matins and prayers as he goes the round of his limitation.\* Women may now go safely up and down ; in every bush and under every tree there is no other incubus but he, and he will do them no dishonor."

All the remainder of the fragment is devoted to the continued contest between the Friar and the Sompnour, which naturally finds its climax in their Tales. Chaucer's satire could not lash both classes more mercilessly than by making each of these rascals demolish the other. And, well agreeing with the excited dramatic movement, each of these fellows interrupts the other in his Tale, and the Sompnour, in a rage at his rival's story, immediately relates a disgusting anecdote about friars in hell, before beginning his own Tale.

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\* Limiters were begging friars "limited" to a certain district or "limitation."



Both their Tales are taken from older fables. What the Friar relates of an English Sompnour in his own neighborhood is told in short mediæval prose romances or anecdotes, sometimes of a seneschal, sometimes of a lawyer. The greedy, merciless hero meets the devil in human form; each is looking after his own business, and the devil makes up to the fellow with the intention of getting possession of all that the people allot to him. Upon the way they overhear the curses of an angry carter at his lazy horses; this, however, has no effect upon the devil; but when somebody in earnest wishes his companion to the devil, the fiend at once takes the order, because it comes from the heart, and carries the fellow off. The idea of making the Sompnour the chief personage here probably belongs to Chaucer; and thus, from a mere anecdote, he has created a highly fascinating Tale, excellently arranged and very vividly related. The appearance of the devil in the form of a yeoman riding out in the early morning to hunt gives the narrative a peculiar charm. The dialogue between the two travelers is a little masterpiece; all the audacity and callousness of the Sompnour are there revealed, as also the shamelessness of his office, to which even he himself is afraid to give its proper name; while his mysterious companion tells, little by little, but always plainer and plainer, of his occupation and residence. The final catastrophe is most excellently prepared.

The Sompnour's Tale about the dirty trick played by a sick, bedridden peasant in Holderness on a luxurious, greedy, hypocritical friar, shows a certain relationship to a well-known French fabliau.\* Chaucer has treated the coarse subject with ingenious freedom, and at the same time with the highest artistic tact, and has presented a ludicrous farce through the medium of high-style comedy. In psychological observation, clear outline, and characteristic miniature painting, joined to a strong application of local coloring and comic power, this Tale may be compared with Chaucer's best.

The group containing the Student, Merchant, Squire,

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\* See Appendix.

and Franklin consists of four fragments, originally separate, but which were thrown together, little by little, with some vacillations in the plan of arrangement, and bound into a whole. This process, which we must leave for future consideration, is reflected in the transmitted manuscripts, which show the different parts of the group to have been tossed about and torn asunder in many ways and placed in other positions. The poet, however, has expressed his final intention on this occasion with sufficient clearness,\* and we are thus justified in speaking of one fragment and not of four.

The action of the Pilgrimage in this fragment is not so dramatic as in the one last mentioned; yet it is not without interesting features and clear characterization. The society into which the poet leads us here is very different from that appearing in the previous fragment. We here move exclusively among respectable people, educated men, whom we would gladly invite to our house. The difference in their position, education, age, and character secures the necessary alternation in the subject and tone of their utterances and tales. The modest, dreamy, learned student of Oxford is brought very interestingly upon the scene. It falls especially to his lot, along with the Lawyer, to represent the poet. Chaucer, therefore, makes him relate not only one of his own favorite poems, the story of Griselda, but at the same time, in his person, the poet pays a debt of gratitude and reverence to his great master, Francesco Petrarca:

I will you tell a talë, which that I  
 Learned at Padow of a worthy clerk,  
 As proved by his wordës and his werk.  
 He is now dead, and nailed in his chest,  
 I pray to God so give his soulë rest,  
 Francis Petrarc, the laureat poet,  
 Hightë this clerk, whose retorikë sweet  
 Illumin'd all Itáille of poetry.†

This Student, who sings the Song of Songs of true

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\* This does not necessarily include the removal of small chronological and other discrepancies, nor the filling up of the great gap caused by the non-completion of the Squire's Tale. For the division of the group by some writers into two fragments, see Appendix.

† The Clerk of Oxenforde's Prologue, l. 26-33; Tyrwhitt, *Cant. Tales*, l. 7902-7909.

and tender womanhood in the concert of the Canterbury Pilgrims, is very different from the Students in the Tales of the Miller and Reeve. Chaucer has not forgotten, however, to give to him also a certain dose of roguishness, without which he would not have been a typical representative of his class, nor a fit substitute for the poet. Two stanzas attached to the story of Griselda, and an envoy in six six-lined stanzas, complete the picture of the worthy Clerk :

But one word, Lordlings, heark'neth ere I go :  
 It were full hard to finden now-a-days  
 In all a town Griseldas three or-two :  
 For if that they were put to such assays,  
 The gold of them hath now so bad allays  
 With brass, that though the coin be fair at eye  
 It wouldë rather brast a-two than plie.

For which here, for the Wifë's love of Bath,  
 Whose life and all her sectë God maintene  
 In high mast'ry, and ellës were it scath,  
 I will with lusty heartë fresh and green,  
 Say you a song to gladden you, I ween :  
 And let us stint of earnestful mattëre  
 Heark'neth my song, that saith in this mannère.\*

And then comes the Envoy with its keen satire, in the form of sarcastic advice to women.

The Merchant takes his cue from the last stanza of the Envoy to complain bitterly of his own domestic cross: "Though the fiend were coupled to her she would overmatch him, I dare well swear. Why should I rehearse in special her deep malice? She is a thorough shrew. There is a long and large difference betwixt Griselda's great patience and the unparalleled cruelty of my wife. Ah! good Sir Host, I am wedded only these two months, and yet I trow that he who has been wifeless all his life, though men should thrust him through the heart, could never tell so much sorrow as I could tell you of my wife's cursedness." The Host thinks that since the Merchant is so well acquainted with this cross he should relate something of the sort to the company. The unhappy husband declares himself ready;

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\* Clerk's Tale, l. 225-238; Tyrwhitt, Cant. Tales, l. 9039-9052.

though of his own sorrow he wishes to say no more, for it pains his heart. He then relates the Tale already known to us as *January and May*, a really bitter satire on married life, but well thought out and delightfully told.

For two of the principal pieces of the Fragment the poet was thus able to use up two of his former poems without change. The Squire's Tale, on the other hand, he must have written especially for this character—unfortunately without finishing it. This fascinating magic Tale—indeed, it is rather a web of such tales—is told in bold and flowing narrative style; its essential elements no doubt belong to the distant East. Many of the motives here employed are found in the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights, and had probably found their way to Western literature through the Arabs; I refer here to the magic mirror of Virgil, and to the wooden horse, which plays so great a part in Adenet's *Cleomades*,\* and which Chaucer represents as a horse of brass. The English poet, however, apparently drew the material of this Central Asiatic legend from neither the Arabian nor Western versions, but from some more direct source, whether oral or written; and the resemblance which has been pointed out between him and Marco Polo in their description of Tartar affairs may be due to their both having drawn from that source, which is now unknown. Under these circumstances it is quite impossible to fill in with any safety the continuation of the Tale, which breaks off at an early stage of its development. But how well the poet has succeeded in the extant portion in arousing our imagination and exciting our interest is proved alike by Spenser's attempt to complete one part of the fable in his *Faërie Queene*, and by Milton's regret, expressed in one of his finest poems, at the fragmentary nature of the original.†

The subject is in thorough keeping with the personality of the speaker, and the lively and learned recital is truly characteristic of the Squire, with his reminiscences of Arthurian romances, his knowledge of rhetoric, and his

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\* See Appendix.† *Ibid.*



wide reading, which is seen throughout, notwithstanding all his asseverations of modesty.

The eloquence and wisdom of the Squire rouse the enthusiasm of the sturdy Franklin, who bewails the vulgar tendencies of his own son in comparison with the fine manners of the Squire. Here we feel removed to a time when the wealthier landowners were rising rapidly into prominence, and were beginning to dispute the social rank with the old and much impoverished knightly class. A new aristocracy of blood, however, such as is manifested in the appearance and deportment of the "gentleman," could not be created at a stroke, and we can understand how the rich old Franklin, excellent in his way, places virtue and a good moral life far above worldly possessions.

But the Franklin, personally, is not without education. The *captatio benevolentiae*, with which he prefaces his story, shows that he has well understood certain technical phrases of rhetoric in the Squire's Tale, and that he might well vie with such fine people in discretion, in spite of his less polished education. The poet works this out strikingly, and with exquisite variations of light and shade. The Tale itself reveals a considerable amount of reading, of which perhaps too liberal use is made in the long monologue of the distressed heroine.

The fable itself is significant ; its main features are, indeed, also known in the East,\* but Chaucer, like his "Frankelcyn," drew it from Brittany, where the scene of the action is laid. It has all the special charm belonging to the Breton lays, at least in their French renderings. The knight Arviragus leaves for a while his tenderly beloved wife, young Dorigene, in order to acquire glory in the English wars. During his absence a young squire named Aurelius is seized with a violent passion for the beautiful lady. He adores her a long time in secret, until he gains courage to tell her of his love, and conjures her in affecting words to preserve his life, which depends upon her favor. Dorigene rejects his suit unhesitatingly ; but she adds, in fun, that she will grant his

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\* See Appendix.



request if he will make the rocks disappear from the Breton coast. Through the aid of a clerk of Orleans, who is versed in magic, and to whom he promises a thousand pounds, Aurelius succeeds in achieving the impossible. Dorigene is thus caught in her own trap, and, beside herself at her situation, thinks of putting an end to her life rather than sacrifice her chastity and marriage vow. At this crisis her husband returns, and in tears she tells him all. Arviragus conceals his pain as well as he can, and orders her to keep her promise to Aurelius. But Aurelius is touched with the magnanimity of the husband and the distress of the wife, and frees her from the fulfillment of her promise. The magician, also, will not be behind the rest in generosity ; when he hears the story he renounces the thousand pounds. The contagious influence of good, proceeding from a common as well as from a noble disposition, and the wondrous power of love, are beautifully symbolized in this fable. And throughout all his story Chaucer gives special prominence to the idea by which the whole receives its internal completion, viz., the idea that love and force mutually exclude each other, while patience and forbearance belong to the very essence of love. By this alone our poet's treatment of the fable is raised far above Boccaccio's rendering of this subject in his *Decamerone* (x. 5.). The Teutonic reader will likewise miss in the Italian romance that strength of passion shown in the English version. And by that mixing of motives so common to the Southerner, by which prudence and the impulse of the heart are made to act powerfully at the same moment, he will receive an impression which weakens and disturbs the purity of the effect, instead of heightening it. Boccaccio, however, after his manner, tells his tale with great artistic effect ; and the man of refined literary tastes will find a pleasure in comparing the Italian's story with Chaucer's.

The next fragment brings the Pardoner to the front. After the Wife of Bath, this character had the greatest attraction for Chaucer's satiric muse. He makes a doctor of the body serve as a foil to the spiritual doctor of miracles ; the fragment is, therefore, opened by the Doc-

tor of Physic, who, in spite of his prepossessing exterior, is as good a hand at swindling and extracting money as the Pardoner. But the poet has not taken the time to enlarge very much on the picture of the Physician given in the general Prologue. The fragment begins at once with the Doctor's Tale, for which the story of Virginia, as previously composed, is taken without change. On account of its desperate, bloody ending Chaucer may have thought this piece appropriate to the character of the Doctor and his professional acquaintance with violent remedies; its contents and form, besides, were well suited for this worthy, learned gentleman. The Host is much moved at the sad death of the chaste and beautiful maiden, and, as if to banish the impression, he makes some half-joking, half-sarcastic remarks to the Doctor, who deigns him no answer. He then turns to the Pardoner, ordering him to tell at once some mirthful, jovial tale. "It shall be done," says the Pardoner, "but first, here at this ale-stake\* I will drink and take a bit of cake." The more refined members of the company ("the gentils") won't hear any ribaldry, they say, but something moral and instructive. The Pardoner agrees, saying he will think upon some honest theme while drinking.

He utilizes this pause, however, by giving his hearers a highly amusing description of the way he preaches in church to the congregations he visits, and how he gathers in money and valuables on such occasions. Here again we have a highly delicious piece of the most cutting satire, which only loses somewhat of its bitterness from the fact that it comes from the Pardoner himself, who unmasks his trade and practices with that shamelessness and barefaced frankness which the atmosphere of the *Canterbury Tales* requires. Although in a comparatively short compass, these "Confessions" form a sort of sequel to the *Wife of Bath's* preamble, and bear the stamp of the same poetic workshop. In his Tale, however, the speaker only offers an illustration of his introductory remarks, by giving a sample of his sermons. But the Tale is none the less interesting; for, if the Par-

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\*A long stake, decorated with a wreath, was used at that time and for long afterwards instead of a signboard for beerhouses.

doner always preaches on the same theme—"Radix malorum est cupiditas"—he has certainly the habit of giving his sermons a flavor by his numerous illustrations from ancient history, for "ignorant people love old tales, such things they can easily retain and report."\* In the present case he confines himself to one story, which he only once interrupts, towards the beginning, by a long digression interlarded with quotations and examples of the fatal effects of drunkenness, gluttony, gambling, and swearing: Three insolent, dissolute fellows in Flanders, whose comrade had been carried off by Death in a state of helpless intoxication, determine to wreak their vengeance upon Death, and to give him the finishing stroke, if they can only find him. Searching for this dangerous foe, they meet an old, old man, all wrapped up but his face; he is condemned, he says, to wander restless up and down, because Death will not have his life; and late and early he knocks with his staff on the ground, which is his mother's gate, and begs to be let in. The godless wretches ask him if he knows where they may find this Death, and he points up a crooked path to the foot of an old oak tree in a grove. They hurry up, and find a treasure of some eight bushels of coined gold florins! Great is their joy, but of short duration; it is soon seen how well the old man had directed them. Out of greed two of them kill the third, and then drink off the wine the other had poisoned! The outlines of this fable may be seen in one of the *Cento Nouvelle Antiche*; but Chaucer may have come by it in a Flemish, French, or Latin version. His presentation of the subject is deeply poetic and tinged with mystery. The connecting of the treasure with the Wandering Jew is an extremely happy stroke, although indeed we do not know by whom it was first done; thus the idea, which has disappeared from the Italian versions, that the three treasure-finders are seeking Death, has received increased significance.

The profound moral of this Tale corresponds to the profound hypocrisy of the relater. How much the poet was interested in this character is plain from the fact

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\* The Prologue of the Pardoner, l. 151, ff.

that in no part of the *Canterbury Tales* is the connection between the individual figure and the general framework so close as in the apotheosis of the Pardoner. It is an exquisite touch to make the speaker, at the end of his sermon, recommend his relics and pardons, according to his old habit, to the pilgrims, and especially to the Host. The rough dispatch he receives from the Host threatens to disturb the general peace ; but the worthy Knight, in his kindly way, brings about an agreement.

The fragment beginning with the Shipman and ending with the Nun's Priest is distinguished from all the rest, as has been said elsewhere, by its variety, so that it seems like a miniature picture of the entire work. All the forms of verse,\* and most of the literary species found in the *Canterbury Tales*, occur in this fragment, and many of them nowhere else.

The Shipman's Tale is placed at the beginning, but without any connecting introduction, and was originally written for the Wife of Bath ; † in heroic couplets it treats the subject of a highly seasoned French fabliau ; Don John, a monk of Paris, is on a very friendly footing with an old comrade from the country, now living as a rich merchant with his beautiful wife at St. Denis ; the monk obtains the favor of the vain woman by lending her a hundred francs to pay her debts. This sum, however, he had secretly borrowed from her husband ; when the latter requires the money for his business, and in a most delicate manner asks for its repayment, the monk refers him to his wife, to whom it had already been given. Chaucer has treated this hazardous subject with an artistic taste beyond all praise. The Tale is a cabinet-piece of the happiest conception and the most charming and careful execution. There is not a touch that fails in its effect, not a word too little or too much. The same fable occurs in a somewhat different form in the *Decamerone* (viii. 1), and is repeated by La Fontaine (*Contes*, ii. 9), ‡ in his usual forcible and witty way ; but

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\* The only exception, which is scarcely worth mentioning, is the six-lined strophe in the Envoy to the Student's Tale.

† See Appendix.

‡ The subject was afterwards put into dramatic form by Collé.



neither Boccaccio nor La Fontaine can vie with Chaucer's art. Chaucer is the only one who can handle the simple and happy motives of the mediæval romances with that plastic realism and illusive effect of modern art, and at the same time with the ingenuousness of a bygone age.

This bold farce is followed by a *conte dévot*, or legend of the Virgin, which the amiable, tender-hearted Prioress relates in beautiful seven-lined stanzas, on the courteous solicitation of the Host. It is the story, well-known to mediæval tradition, of a pious Christian boy, who is murdered by the Jews and cast into a pit. He had always been a zealous servant of the Virgin, and on this account he was murdered; and now by a miracle she reveals the crime of his death, the murderers are terribly punished, and the young martyr's body is solemnly entombed.

The effect of this touching legend is seen in the solemn silence of the whole pilgrim company, and is also manifested in the style of the poet, for in the following piece he retains the seven-lined stanza employed by the Prioress. Chaucer himself now comes upon the scene in a most amiable humor:

When said was this miracle every man  
 As sober was, that wonder was to see,  
 Till that our Host to jopen<sup>1</sup> he began,  
 And then at erst he looked upon me,  
 And said<sup>2</sup> thus: "What man art thou?" quod he;  
 "Thou lookest as thou wouldest find a hare,  
 For ever upon the ground I see thee stare.

"Approach<sup>3</sup> near, and look up merrily.  
 Now ware you, sirs, and let this man have place.  
 He in the waist is shapen as well as I;  
 This were a puppet in an arm t' embrace  
 For any woman, small and fair of face,  
 He seemeth elfish by his countenance,  
 For unto no wight doth he dalliance.

"Say now somewhat, since other folk have said;  
 Tell us a tale of mirth, and that anon."  
 "Haste," quod I, "Ne be not evil apaid,<sup>2</sup>  
 For other tal<sup>3</sup>, certes, can I none,



But of a rhyme I learned yore ago.”  
 “Yea, that is good,” quod he, “we shallen hear  
 Some dainty thing, methinketh by thy chere.” \*

<sup>1</sup> Joke.

<sup>2</sup> Dissatisfied.

When Chaucer had once decided to play the wag, the *εἶρων*, the choice of a tale was not far to seek. He begins a minstrel ballad in doggerel rhyme, and its tone is very different from the artistic style of the preceding and following pieces. His story of the noble Sir Thopas—who in a dream falls desperately in love with the Fairy Queen, rides away through fairyland, and there meets a mighty giant, from whom he retreats in order to go home for his armor—is in form and substance a masterpiece of parody. Chaucer borrowed the ordinary motives of the most admired minstrel poems of his time, and he had only to heighten them a little and give them a different turn and connection, in order to produce the most ridiculous effect. The absolute hollowness and incoherency which characterize such compositions, the entire absence of art and sense which strove in vain to hide its nakedness in mountebank asseverations, in strong application of colors on small details, in arbitrary accumulation of traditional traits and formal patchwork, are admirably shown up in Chaucer’s imitation; but there is also present in his poem that naïve charm, that ancient epic heritage, which the minstrels still possessed. And in order not to fail in his object the poet keeps with such admirable tact within the delicate line of parody, that dull critics have even considered these rhymes as the serious work of a real minstrel!—So well has Chaucer hit the tone of this sort of writing, the metre of which he uses with a perfect mastery, though sometimes with certain liberties. But if he occasionally violates the rule in his language and rhyme, which he otherwise so closely observes, he evidently does so here intentionally.

The parody on the practice of his poorer brethren of the Muse was the natural result of a cultivated taste, and of a justifiable self-confidence called forth by the want of critical acumen in the masses, and was required in the

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\* Prologue to Sir Thopas (Chaucer’s own Tale).

literary Pantheon of the Canterbury Tales. Chaucer kept clear of everything bitter or insulting in his satire. The minstrels, as such, could feel the less aggrieved, since they were quite unable to see through the poet's meaning in Sir Thopas, if the piece was even known to them. The parody was a good-natured joke—even more good-natured than in Shakspeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*—but above all a lesson to the public. The fact that Chaucer took the place of the minstrel himself made the joke, indeed, much more pungent, but much less cutting.

The Host does not let the speaker end his story. Exactly at the moment where the subject promises to become interesting, he interrupts him with the rough remark: "No more of this, for God's sake; thou makest me weary of thy lewdness, my ears ache with thy worthless speech . . . this is certainly rhyme doggerel." Chaucer protests in vain against this attack on his liberty of speech, and assures him it is the best rhyme he knows of. His impatient critic asserts that his rhyming is not worth a clod; it is simply wasting time; "but let us see whether thou canst not relate something in alliteration, or at least tell somewhat in prose, which may have some mirth or instruction." Chaucer declares himself willing, and, after a few introductory remarks, relates an edifying story in prose. What he offers is not much more than a mere translation of the French treatise, *Le Livre de Mellibée et Prudence*, which again is only a shortened version of the *Liber Consolationis et Consilii* of Judge Albertano of Brescia, written in the year 1246, and soon translated into several languages. The subject is an allegorical fable without action, and written with the object of inculcating the value of superior prudence and the duty of a forgiving patience, the whole being at the same time a sort of worship of noble womanhood. The kernel of the story lies in the long discourse with which Melibœus, when hurt in his tenderest affections, is consoled by his wife Prudence, just as Boëthius was consoled, softened, and instructed by Philosophy. These discourses not only show the excellent moral intention of the poet, but also his moral insight, as well as his

great scholastic acumen and the large amount of his scholastic reading. Such qualities recommended the work to mediæval taste, which was not repelled by occasional long digressions, and was rather pleased with frequent repetitions for the sake of numerous proverbs and learned quotations. Such productions are little suited to our time. What Chaucer thought of it is not quite clear, but that he did not set much value on the piece is evident from the fact that he used it for his own Tale upon the Pilgrimage.

The goodness and gentleness of Prudence recall to the Host, by the contrast, the shrewishness and ill-temper of his own wife. When he has sufficiently enlarged on this topic, he turns to the Monk, whom he compliments on his portly, vigorous appearance, with all sorts of good-humored jokes, which may be partly attributed to the impression made by the Shipman's Tale. The Monk has about him something of the majestic repose and discretion of the Mussulman, and endures all patiently, and only notices that part of the Host's remarks which bids him tell a Tale. With this he gladly complies. He has, indeed, a whole collection of subjects ready; they do not, however, betray anything of the noble passion of the sturdy fellow, nor make us in any way assume other passions in him. They correspond rather to his dignity, show something of the wide reading to be expected from a Benedictine, and indicate a man of strong nerves, requiring powerful emotions. "If you list to hearken, I will you tell the life of Saint Edward, or else I will first tell you tragedies, of which I have a hundred in my head." He then adduces his tragedies; *i. e.*, "the history of people who stood in great prosperity and fell from high degree into misery, and ended wretchedly." Instead of one extensive story we receive a series of very short ones, in eight-lined stanzas. This short series, which Chaucer here inserts in his great collection, became in England the type of a species of poems which was cultivated by Lydgate in the fifteenth century, then by Sackville and his continuators, and afterwards by many more in their own way. The taste for collections of tragic stories existed also in other

European nations, and has continued up to modern times. Our poet took his incentive and a good part of the material of the Monk's Tale from Boccaccio's work : *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*. He took some things from a book of the same author, called *De Mulieribus Claris*. He borrowed much from the Bible, the Romance of the Rose, and from his own translation of Boëthius. One story, Ugolino of Pisa, he took from the Divine Comedy. The fates of contemporary heroes, such as Peter of Cyprus and Barnabo Visconti, were known to him personally ; in his intercourse with John of Gaunt he may have received authentic information of the end of Peter the Cruel of Castile.

The poetic value of these different " tragedies " is very unequal ; the best of them is certainly that of Ugolino of Pisa, in which Chaucer has happily reproduced many of the beauties of his original. On the whole, there is a remarkably vigorous, though somewhat prudish and didactic tone in the stories ; the apparent pathos reminds us at times of the style of the murder stories told at fairs. No doubt this was the poet's intention. The arrangement of the several pieces was by no means accidental, though it seems without any system, for which, indeed, the Monk asks our indulgence at the beginning.\* It was thus easiest for the poet to give all he had *in petto*, without arousing the suspicion of completeness.

For he causes the Monk also to be interrupted in his story. The humane and tender-hearted Knight cannot bear so much tragedy all at once ; and the good-natured Host agrees with him for various reasons, but especially because he finds the subject wearisome ; he therefore tells the Monk to relate some hunting tale. But the Monk is not at present in a joking humor, and thinks someone else should take his place. So it comes to the turn of the healthy, jovial Nun's Priest, who seems in

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\* Prologue to the Monk's Tale. The arrangement preferred by the poet is this : Lucifer, Adam, Samson, Hercules, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Zenobia, Peter of Spain, Peter of Cyprus, Barnabo Visconti, Ugolino of Pisa, Nero, Holofernes, Antiochus, Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Cræsus. In some MSS., which represent the most careful editions but are in open contradiction to the Prologue of the Nunne's Priest's Tale (l. 16 and following), the group Peter of Spain and Ugolino of Pisa are placed at the end.



overflowing spirits, in spite of the poor lean jade he had to ride.

His story introduces another new element into the Canterbury Tales, viz., the Animal Epic. It treats of the well-known and pretty fable of the Cock and the Fox, and in evident connection with the *Roman de Renart*, although perhaps not from the version handed down to us. Chanticleer is entrapped by the flattery of the Fox, but by flattering his pride in return he induces Master Reynard to open his mouth at a wrong time, and thus secures his life and freedom. In the French original the subject had been treated in a spirited, lively epic manner, and set off with many details. Chaucer here takes up again the long, rhyming couplet, which he had not used since the Shipman's Tale,\* and seems to have formed in this case quite an opposite ideal of style to that in the former fabliau—in the former, with all the realistic plainness of the narrative, there is an elegant conciseness; here, there is the greatest latitude of diction. He treats his subject in the style of the heroic-comic epos, using his original with the greatest freedom, and showing the happiest invention, the serenest humor, and the finest tact. The development of the action is well motived; the figures of Chanticleer and Dame Partelote, his favorite Sultana, and the Fox, are drawn with a true and tender hand; the locality, the surroundings, and the season are most vividly depicted; a multitude of smaller traits increase the illusion, and many episodes, especially those put into the dialogue, fulfill their object as elements of suspense in the most suitable and entertaining manner. The ironical pathos, which is essential to the style employed, is effectively expressed without becoming obtrusive: and the long, learned digressions, interspersed with deep reflections on predestination, show us in the speaker, the priest Sir John, at once the learned theologian and the wag, who is as well acquainted with "Burnellus †" as with the works of Thomas Bradwardine.

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\* We do not here refer to the connecting pieces, which (with the exception of the one introducing Sir Thopas) have also in this fragment the ordinary form, but solely to the Tales.

† The poem of Nigel Wireker: *Burnellus seu Speculum Stultorum*, of which we spoke briefly in the first volume of this work, p. 187 (English version).



The fragment which terminates\* so brilliantly with this tale unmistakably belongs to the parts composed towards the end of the whole collection. As the Shipman's Tale was originally intended for the Wife of Bath, so also in another place a previous stage of the Canterbury Tales is assumed as past.† On the other hand the mention of the town of Rochester, in the prologue to the Monk's Tale (l. 38), shows that it was intended to give the fragment an earlier place in the poetic chronology of the Pilgrimage than we might assume from the present arrangement of the parts. The poet, who here collected all his strength once more, and saw the idea of the whole taking form clearly and vividly within him, had intended this piece, with all its rich, compact, and characteristic fullness, for a place between the beginning and the middle, but nearer to the middle, when the person of the poet himself appropriately advanced from the background to take its place.

Three fragments still remain to be considered ; one with two pieces, and two with one piece each.

The first is very similar in construction to the fragment devoted to the Doctor-Pardoner group. Like that, it begins immediately with a tale which is really one of the poet's old productions ; indeed, here it is a poem from a very early period, viz., the Legend of Saint Cecilia. Since he had already provided for the Prioress, he attributed this tale to the Nun accompanying her. When this legend is ended, the Pilgrimage is met by two travelers at Boughton-under-Blee, some five miles from Canterbury. Men and horses are sweating profusely, for they had ridden hard for three miles to catch up the jolly company who had left the inn before them. These are a Canon and his servant or yeoman, who are most vividly introduced by the poet, and whose appearance and character become more and more distinct and transparent. The Host begins a conversation with the servant, in order to learn something about his master.

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\* Strictly speaking, there follows another short connecting piece, which is not without use for the characterization of the Nun's Priest ; but as it was unfinished and kept in suspense, it has been left out of most manuscripts.

† See Appendix.

In this conversation it gradually comes out that the Canon is a practiced Alchemist. The evil conscience of the Canon makes him regard with suspicion the increasing confidence of the two speakers, till at length he bids his servant be silent; but encouraged by the Host the servant is not intimidated; then, fearing a complete exposure, the Canon rides off at full speed, burning with rage and shame. The servant now gives a detailed account of the acts and doings of the master in whose service he had fooled away his time, money, health, and strength. Chaucer's satire had already scourged many of the superstitions of his time, such as natural magic, astrology, and dream-reading; but if we omit the superstition practiced under the mask of religion, there is none which he brands with such power and pungency as alchemy. We receive a detailed description, founded on an exact knowledge of facts, of the instruments, materials, and methods of the alchemists. In the story of their ever-renewed and ever-futile attempts we see nothing but human greed, incredulity, and exaggerated confidence, in their typical forms. We see the sophistry of passion, which makes self-deception easy, and the nice psychical transitions which turn the deceived into deceivers. The Canon, who has just left the company, belongs to the class of deceivers. The picture of the accomplished sharper, who goes about in cold blood taking advantage of the credulous, and robbing the simple of their goods and chattels by means of his jugglery, is well shown up in another alchemist—also a Canon—whom the servant well knew during his long years of practice. This Tartuffe in alchemy forms the hero, and the vile deception which he practiced on a London priest forms the contents, of the story, which is attached to the general description by the way of supplement and illustration.

The story seems not to have been invented, but to have been taken in substance from real life. Certain peculiarities of tone and diction in this Tale enable us to see that it is the poet himself who is here speaking under the guise of the Canon's servant, and leave the impression that he had a personal interest in the exposure of

that mock science and its deceitful adepts. Was Chaucer ever in his later years, when constantly pressed by want of money, and when gold must, therefore, have been the more desirable, a prey to the Alchemists, or had he seen some of his friends sacrificed by these swindlers? However this may be, the vengeance which he, as a poet, took on the deceivers was brilliant and complete. And perhaps a part of the credit of having introduced those laws against the practice of alchemy which were passed \* a few years after his death belongs to his energetic exposure of their tricks.

The Manciple's Tale takes us back to the old mythology. It treats in a very clever way a subject which has been frequently dealt with since the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid (ii. 542 ff.), viz.: The adultery of Coronis, the treachery of the raven, Apollo's vengeance on the adulterous wife, his repentance, and the consequent punishment of the raven, which had told him of her guilt. Chaucer's story replaces the raven by a crow, and appears in other points to have been influenced by a story similar to the classical myth and certainly related to this one, viz.: the story of the magpie in the *Seven Wise Masters*. Certain singularities in his poem necessarily result from the object he had in view. In addition to the practical lesson that "speech is silver, silence gold," the essential lesson with him is the theoretic discernment of the fact that natural impulses cannot be eradicated. The way in which he realizes this idea reminds us, at times, of Shakspeare's words in *Hamlet* (i. 5, 53-58):

But virtue, as it never will be moved,  
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,  
So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,  
Will sate itself in a celestial bed,  
And prey on garbage.

In the Manciple's discourse we see a talent for brisk narrative, not going too deep into details, united with a strong moralizing vein; we have reminiscences from Cato's distichs, from the Romance of the Rose, from Horace; and many common proverbs are also frequently

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\* See Appendix.

found. The Manciple attributes to his mother much of his wisdom. The Tale is introduced by a connecting piece, which, besides the Manciple and the never failing Host, brings also the Cook upon the scene. It seems that early that morning the Cook had been making himself dull and stupid with drinking—a circumstance which gives the poet the occasion for a long scene of drastic comedy. The place of action is a village in the neighborhood of Canterbury; but we cannot exactly make out whether the poet originally wrote this piece for the out-journey, or for the beginning of the journey home: the latter seems to us the more probable.

The fragment containing the Parson's Tale was unquestionably intended as the conclusion of the whole. It was probably composed at a time when the poet no longer entertained the hope of accompanying his pilgrims back from Canterbury to Southwark. This, no doubt, was the reason for joining this fragment to the Manciple's Tale; but, although done perhaps by the poet himself, such a junction was for more than one reason impossible. There is, therefore, a certain obscurity about the statements in the last fragment. All the pilgrims have fulfilled their obligations to tell a Tale, with the single exception of the Parson. The day is drawing to a close, and there is a feeling that their place of destination is now not far distant. But it is not of this journey's ending that the Parson speaks, but of that heavenly Jerusalem to which he wishes here to show his listeners the way.

In his introductory words the venerable Parson appears earnest, modest, simple, and quite in keeping with his character in the general Prologue. Like Wiclif he does not deal in rhymes or fables, but declares himself ready to speak plain prose, and to offer pious doctrines and reflections. But with this serious bent of mind he unites the decided wish to remain within the existing church, and to avoid suspicion of heterodoxy. He emphasizes the fact of his being born in the South, and his consequent inability to speak in alliterative style, as some of Wiclif's disciples, following in Langland's footsteps, frequently did. But above all, and at the very



beginning, he declares himself ready to listen to the instruction and correction of the learned, for he does not pretend to be able to interpret the Bible, and therefore takes merely his theme from it.\*

His sermon treats of repentance. But we need not dwell long upon it, for it has not been preserved in its original form. Different hands, whose work is badly matched, may be distinctly seen in the Parson's Tale. No divergence in religious principles, or, we should rather say, in the religious party tendencies, can at all be noticed in the text before us; and to scrape up the original text would be very difficult, since we have no exact idea how much of it is Chaucer's independent work, nor of his talent as a preacher, especially in prose.†

We must therefore rest satisfied with the recognition of the fact that Chaucer's great poem closes with a sermon, with a pious exhortation to repentance. At the end of the motley crowd of his Canterbury Pilgrims we see the pure and venerable figure of the country Parson, teaching and working in the very spirit of the Gospel, as he points all men to that universal and eternal goal of the great Earthly Pilgrimage.

Such a conclusion is not strange; on the contrary, it is in perfect harmony with the spirit of the Middle Ages. And yet it is most significant as showing Chaucer's frame of mind when he gave the final touches to his great master-work.

#### XIV.

In this great symphony of mediæval poetry there is found no echo of the English popular song; in the unfinished state of the Canterbury Tales this is of all things the most to be regretted. The oldest manuscripts of the work contain, indeed, a tale, viz., the Tale of Gamelyn, attached to the first fragment, closely related to the popular song; but then, no critical acumen is

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\* See Appendix.

† The Tale of Melibœus is, indeed, nothing but a translation, and the Parson's Tale may also be a translation, such as it flowed from Chaucer's pen; but see Appendix.



required to perceive that this Tale is not by Chaucer. The great poet, whose whole development tended to an ever closer understanding of the nature of his people, did not live to incorporate the most spontaneous utterances of that people in his many-tongued artistic work, neither did he find the time nor the disposition to set in action the most original and national type among all his pilgrims, viz., the Knight's Yeoman.

The character of the Yeoman given by Chaucer in the general Prologue is not very detailed, and in no way individualized; it has, however, a distinct freshness, and is drawn with a decided liking. A similar figure occurs in the Friar's Tale. When on his way to plunder the old widow, the Sompnour sees "before him ride a gay yeoman under a forest side; a bow he bore and arrows bright and keen, he had on a short coat of green, and a hat upon his head with fringe of black." It is only the black fringe here that makes us fear that this prepossessing and engaging figure is the arch-fiend himself. There is no doubt that Chaucer looked with special pleasure on the yeomanry of England. Those valiant hunters and bowmen, those sturdy peasants' sons, formed the true defense and fighting power of the nation. Upon the fields of Crécy and Poitiers, as afterwards at Agincourt, their long bows overmatched the lances of the chivalry of France. It was among them especially that the popular poetry flourished. The hero of the people in mediæval England was Robin Hood, and Robin Hood is essentially a creation of their unconscious poetical activity.

Yeomen and freeholders had doubtless sung of Robin Hood since the thirteenth century. The ideals of a people yet uncontaminated by courtly influences were embodied in his form, although the consequences of the Norman rule had been powerfully felt in their social position, their morals, and their views; but these people were English out and out, though they rather looked upon their past through the misty and idealizing veil of poetry. Dim recollections of the Storm God Wodan, and his furious host, which had long since been changed into a troop of earthly, though also spectral, huntsmen who ranged the woods at midnight, were mixed up with

the impressions which the period of the conquerors and their sons had left behind. At that time the English people looked with warm sympathy and enthusiasm on those valiant men, who, though outlawed and despoiled of their goods and honors, prolonged their miserable existence in woods and wildernesses, and waged a guerilla war of desperation under their heroic leaders against the powerful and haughty foe. At that time the people groaned under the Draconian game-laws of the monarchs, whose ancestor, the Conqueror, had preserved and loved the beasts of the chase as if they had been his children ; and the transgressors and victims of these laws were followed in their changeful fate by the people's heartfelt sympathy. At that time arose the glorifying halo which still surrounded the figure of the outlaw, the poacher, the strong and independent man, although succumbing in fight with gamekeepers and sheriffs ; and though the situation had totally changed, this ideal still remained in the mind of even loyal citizens. And then, beneath all this, there lay that joyful and mysterious longing for the greenwood, inherited from the old Germanic times, and living on undimmed among the yeomen of mediæval England ; there lay beneath it all the passion for their own primeval occupation—viz., for hunting and the archer's craft.

From elements like these the form of Robin Hood had grown, and in such a figure the yeomanry created a glorified ideal of their own character ; viz., the merry sportsman, perfectly happy anywhere under the open sky, without a roof above him, except the rustling leaves of the forest, tracking the game to its den, listening to the song of the birds ; the marksman, who never misses his mark, whose sharp eye and steady arm accomplish even the incredible ; the strong and fearless man, full of confidence in his own dexterity and strength ; the generous hero, who gladly comes with advice and help to the weak and the unfortunate and those unjustly oppressed, and always ready to render women knightly service ; the faithful and self-sacrificing leader, who stakes everything in order to free a comrade in distress ; the enthusiastic adorer of the Virgin ; the enemy of hard-hearted merchants

rich prelates and monks, and the dreaded antagonist of gamekeepers and sheriffs—for in such a man all this was quite compatible with homage and devotion to the king. Robin Hood is an outlaw—although the legends did not give themselves the trouble of showing proper motives for such a situation ; he is a poacher, he is even a robber. The essential traits of his character are found in the ideal bandit everywhere. But only in the English popular hero is there at once that enhancement of the rough and the tender elements of his nature, and especially that mixture of humor and innate delight in the world and in life, which lends the strongest charm to the poetry in his honor. Robin lived in the woods like a prince, surrounded by a band of well-clad, well-armed bowmen, who were ready to appear at any moment on a sign from their master, and hurried to his help as soon as he blew his horn. A breath of Arcadian delight pervades the atmosphere around him, but there is no enervating tendency, and every indulgence and refinement are excluded. In this consists the charm, rather felt than recognized, which these poems have exercised for many centuries upon the English mind.

It is in the second half of the fourteenth century that we first meet with a direct testimony to the existence of poems about Robin Hood.\* But then there was as yet no need to have these poems fixed in writing ; and if any songs of this cycle were actually written down at that time the document has totally perished.

The effects of these or kindred cycles of song were, however, strongly felt on the minstrel poetry in the fourteenth century. It will be well to devote a few words here to the external fortunes of this class—the minstrels.

Some few from the ranks of the English “Gleemen” and “Harpers” obtained, at the palaces of bishops and nobles, and even at the royal court, a position similar to that previously held by the Anglo-Norman “minstrels,” and still more brilliantly in the old Saxon times, by the “Scôpas.” Such phenomena as the flourishing of allit-

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\* In *Piers Plowman* B. V. 402 (C. viii. 11), Sloth says : “I know rhymes on Robin Hood and Randolph, Earl of Chester, but not a line of any poem on our Saviour or Our Dear Lady.” About Randolph see later, Book V. chap. 14.

erative romances in the west of England must have been connected with the elevation of the native minstrel class. But as it was not easy to distinguish between the old English "Scôp" and the "Gleeman," it was just as difficult in the fourteenth century to distinguish the "Gleeman" or "Singer" of the court from the "Singer" of the people.

If the former was more dignified than the latter, there were many intermediate grades connecting the two positions; if the former was more stationary than the latter, he was also often seized by the desire or need of wandering through the land. And many cloisters were visited not only by wandering minstrels of the popular sort, but also occasionally by those in the service of a bishop or a king; and the welcome guests may have rejoiced the hearts of the pious brotherhood by an episode from Guy of Warwick, or by any other legendary tale. The title of "minstrel" was attached to members of the lower as well as of the higher class, and alternated with their other older designations.

The times were not propitious for the cultivation of a distinct and separate class of court minstrels. Scarcely had the native mediæval poetry attained to a place of honor, when at the court, in the middle of the concert of poems modeled on the French, Chaucer's voice was heard, and in his art was seen the radiant dawning of a better day, in the light of which the star of minstrel poetry grew pale. The poet was the first who united great genius and extensive reading to a deep knowledge of mankind and the fine training of a man of the world; then in his tracks followed the spirits of a lower order, in whom school learning and moral and didactic tendencies were joined with decided literary aspirations, and whose glance, though much less clear than the master's, was nevertheless directed, like his, with admiration to the great poets of classical antiquity.

The golden age of the English minstrels was of short duration, and collapsed with the unequivocal signs of the dissolution of the society of mediæval chivalry. No wonder, then, that the popular element decidedly predominates in the minstrel poems of the fourteenth century, and that even court minstrels not only say but also



sing epic poems, or that the strophic form of verse in the romance poetry encroaches more and more, and is even again employed in the legends.

In a sporadic way we see other strophe-forms appear, besides the still prevalent doggerel rhyme stanza. When we see a part of the romance of *Sir Ferumbras*, of which we shall shortly have to speak in another place, written in strophes of two long lines, which can be changed by the middle rhyme into four short lines, we must recognize the fact as the result of the direct influence of the popular poetry.

For the oldest measure of the popular ballad, and in England the most popular, is a verse with four accents in the first member, and three in the second. Two such long lines generally form the strophe; and the measure employed in *Sir Ferumbras* only differs from this by having a rhyme in the middle also.\*

But besides the form, the subject-matter of the popular poetry was also taken up by the minstrels.

The *Tale of Gamelyn*, that young knightly scion, of generous disposition and great bodily strength, has many points of union with the tradition of Robin Hood. Gamelyn's quarrel with his tyrannical and faithless elder brother brings him into conflict even with the monks and the officials of the government. Forced to flee to the forests as a place of refuge, he meets and joins a band of outlaws, who choose him for their king. And thus he leads for a time exactly the life of a Robin Hood; it is not, indeed, of long duration. For at the conclusion of the Tale the hero is pardoned by the king and made overseer of his forests.

The Tale of Gamelyn is a brisk, attractive composition of minstrel poetry in the form of a romance, in long rhyming couplets, and must have had its origin in the west Midlands, not far from London. The language is very similar to Chaucer's, although in tone and style and versification it is very different from his manner. It seems as if the poet of the Canterbury Tales had himself

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\* The middle rhyme might have been familiar to the poet of this *Ferumbras*-strophe from well-known forms of the legendary poems, or works like Robert Manning's Chronicle.



joined this poem to the manuscript of his first Fragment, presumably with the intention of remolding it for his Yeoman, who should have spoken in this place instead of the Cook.

XV.

In the last ten years of the fourteenth century—the period when the *Canterbury Tales* were composed—Chaucer brought out many other literary works and sketches. The most important of these refer more or less directly to the chief work, whose progress, indeed, they necessarily retarded. In the year 1391 the poet undertook a Treatise on the use of *The Astrolabe* for the introduction of his son Louis into a science which he himself had diligently studied. Such an occupation explains sufficiently the exactness of the astronomical data, by which Chaucer fixed the time of action for his great poem. But he had also many other poetic plans. We perceive, from the introductory words of the Lawyer in the *Canterbury Tales*, that the poet was then closely occupied with the idea of continuing his *Legende of Goode Women*. Even before he had finished the Knight's Tale, he had probably begun the poem of *Anelyda and Arcyte*, which had a most remarkable relationship to the former. In the latter we are again taken back into the heroic age of Greece, such as Boccaccio had depicted it in his *Teseide*. The names of Theseus, Hippolyta, Emilia are heard once more; then we are conveyed to Thebes, where the old Kreon has ruled as Tyrant since the termination of the war against The Seven. There is scarcely any doubt that Chaucer simply took the introductory strophes of his new poem from the older strophic edition of his own *Palamon and Arcite*. After that, however, the picture is totally altered. Anelyda, the beautiful young queen of "Ermonya," or "Armonya," is introduced. Like other nobles of the country she had taken up her residence in the city of Thebes, where the young knight Arcyte, sprung from the blood of Theban kings, falls in love with her and pays her his addresses. Although the lover's rank and name remind us of Pala-

mon's friend, his character is of quite a different composition. This Arcyte is a sort of Don Juan—as soon as he attains his happiness, he becomes disgusted and longs for other charms. It requires his greatest efforts to win the heart of the young queen. After he has made her quite his own, and firmly enchained her, he abandons her for a coquette, who knows better how to manage him, —by keeping him close and playing the tyrant with him. Poor Anelyda beholds herself hurled from the height of happiness to the blankest misery ; she is enabled to prolong her miserable existence only by a glimmer of hope in the return of the faithless youth. Like the heroines in Ovid, she writes a touching "Complaint," and sends it off to Arcyte, pouring forth her sorrows, her despair, her hope. As the poem has come down to us it seems that this "complaint" forms the aim and object of the whole, and many copiers and readers have taken it in this sense. But we can hardly imagine, *a priori*, that the poet intended to drop again so soon the threads of his discourse, which he had taken up at the beginning. Besides, after Anelyda's "complaint" there follows in some manuscripts a narrative strophe, where the heroine is represented in the temple of Mars. It is therefore clear that Chaucer originally thought of continuing the action further ; but how he intended to develop it remains a mystery. There is something puzzling in the whole disposition of the poem ; the character of the story is kept somewhat abstract, and is more a piece of rhetorical painting than an epic narrative. But we may well assume that some drama in the real life around him induced Chaucer to write this counterpart to the story of the faithful and unhappy Arcyte of the Teseide.

"Anelyda and Arcyte" was never finished ; nor was the Squire's Tale, which belonged to a not much later period and in part treated of the same subject. The astronomical treatise was likewise left uncompleted. The *Legende of Goode Women* was not continued, although the poet made a start at it, in which he effected an important alteration of the prologue.\* The plan, also,

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\* See Appendix.

of the Canterbury Pilgrimage, though in its curtailed form, was not even half carried out.

The different plans which occupied in turn the poet's active mind struggled with each other for their realization. Unpleasant incidents in contemporary history had also frequently a disturbing effect upon him. But notwithstanding his youthful nature the poet was now growing old, and was subject to all those personal experiences which rouse or depress the mind, and which must have interfered with the quiet, uniform progress of his poetic work. Many of these personal experiences we see reflected in his lyrics, although not always as clearly as we might desire. On the other hand, his participation in political affairs is only once mentioned, and that very diffidently.

Very little of Chaucer's lyrics is preserved; and if we exclude the love songs of his youth, the loss of which we deplore, he probably did not produce much, and scarcely anything of really great importance.

The poet was by no means void of a lyrical temperament, as many beautiful passages in *Troilus* and elsewhere might prove; he was, however, deficient in the true lyric art. His strength lay in other domains; and as he reserved for himself in his epic tales the right of joining in the conversation, he felt the less need of turning to lyrical or other special forms of expression for the thoughts that stirred within him. He often gives us his best incidentally, sometimes in a veiled form—in allegorical tales or in living figures, to whom he lends his own thoughts and feelings. By following the Italians in his epics he finally attained his own real English style; but in his lyrics he remained attached to the traditional French molds, and these only fettered his genius. A prominent characteristic of Chaucer's poetry is its sincerity and directness. He writes exactly as he feels, and never wishes to seem anything else than what at the moment he really is. If he feels in the humor for talking, he launches out broadly; but many a time he succeeds in finishing a speaking image with a single stroke, and by the simplest or even most commonplace expression he often hits the nail on the head. His freedom is curtailed

in those lyrical, artificial forms ; he can neither stop nor go on as he would like, and where he wishes to speak from the heart he must beat about for the conventional circumlocutions.

This is especially true of the ballad, with its three inter-rhymed strophes and its refrain. It was, nevertheless, much liked in England, as well as in France, its original home. Gower had tried his hand early at this kind of verse, and from time to time always came back to it again. At the conclusion of his *Confessio Amantis* he had written a sort of mirror for married people, or, as he expressed it, for "Married Lovers," in the form of eighteen French ballads.\* But the then master of this kind of writing was the Frenchman, Eustache Deschamps, a man with a fair talent for form, and whose verses frequently show spirit, and generally good sound sense, but very seldom poetry. Chaucer was well acquainted with Deschamps ; the Frenchman sent him some of his works, dedicated to him a flattering poem, in which he praises him as the great translator, and, among other things, congratulates him on his translation of the *Romance of the Rose*. Perhaps he hoped that Master Geoffrey would translate him also. But this, in sooth, it seems, did not take place. But Deschamps had no doubt a certain influence on Chaucer's ballad poetry, with its moral, sententious character.

The earliest preserved ballad of the English poet is in the prologue to the *Legend of Cupid* ; the rest belong to the last ten years of his life.

Chaucer could move more freely in the poetic Envoy, where he was less cramped by the necessities of the rhyme, and could enlarge with greater ease. But the principle which prevails in all his lyrics is observed here also, viz.: the number of strophes must be divisible by three.† The poet, however, does not seem to have often tried this class ; only two such Envoys have been preserved.‡

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\* See Appendix. The envoy is wanting in these ballads ; at the close of the whole collection there is a single independent strophe.

† With this must not be reckoned the strophe which forms the envoy in the narrower sense. The envoy to the ballad frequently occupies a strophe in English poets, but is not necessary to the ballad form.

‡ Unless we wish to count here the single strophe to the writer Adam, who had carelessly copied Boëthius and Troilus.



Chaucer is accustomed to relate a story before the "complaint," and does so in *The Complaynte to Pite*, and *The Complaynte of Mars*, in which the epic part or story is decidedly more important than the complaint, or lyric part. The *Anelyda*, in its fragmentary form, also belongs to this class. In this complaint there are many traits which show deep feeling and close observation, while the poet tries to make the form of the rhyme broader and more artificial than usual.

Of this class only one other song of his later period has been preserved, viz.: *The Complaynte of Venus*. It is without any epic introduction, was an imposed task of little worth in imitation of a French original, and leaves no pleasant impressions. The poem is in a certain sense a continuation of *The Complaint of Mars*. At least, in his description of love and jealousy, the author of the original had in his mind Isabella of York, and, indeed, is said to have written the poem for her.\* The poet was a knight of Savoy, Otto de Granson, whose name appears in English documents as early as the years 1370-80, and twenty years later he entered permanently the service of Richard II. Chaucer's translation was made about the year 1394. In an envoy the translator asks to be excused for the imperfection of his work on account of the difficulty of the task, the rarity of the rhyme in English, and his own advancing years.

Chaucer's ballads and envoys are at least spontaneous utterances of his feelings, and, as such, possess a certain value. The *Envoy to Bukton* takes us to the time of genial humor and playful satire in which the *Wife of Bath* was written. Master Bukton, one of Chaucer's friends, was very anxious to get married. In order to cool his zeal the poet sends him the "Confessions" of that worthy lady, and in an accompanying epistle he takes care to repeat the warning in a direct form: "I dare not write any ill of marriage, lest I myself fall again into such dotage. I will not say that it is the chain of Satan, on which he always gnaws; but I venture to say, were he out of his torment, with his will he would never again be bound. But the doting fool that would

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\* See Appendix.



rather be chained again than creep out of his prison—may God never free him from his misery, and should he even weep hot tears, let no man pity him.” And at the end : “ God grant you to lead your life in freedom ; for it is full hard to be a slave.”

The poem on *Fortune* has quite a different character. Chaucer had experienced, to his cost, the pitiless freaks of the fickle goddess. The position to which Richard called him in July, 1389, had been lost again before the 16th of September, 1391. He was without employment and without bread, and was abandoned by many of his friends, who had only valued him for the reflection of the royal favor. But for this stroke of fortune the poet was better armed than he had been for that previous stroke which came upon him five years earlier with the whole force of novelty, and brought other equally heavy blows in its train. He was now able to compose himself in a shorter time ; and, as he had found his consolation previously in religious contemplations, he now met his fate with philosophic resignation. He called to mind the lessons of his Boëthius, whom in better days he had translated into English prose, and from whom he had afterwards drawn for his poetic pictures of the golden age, with its simplicity, its absence of all wants, its quiet happiness. Now he borrowed arms from the philosopher for his fight with fate. As a man steeled in the school of life, he rejoices to have learnt how to distinguish friend and foe in Fortune's mirror. He tells the goddess her severities have no power over him who can control himself, and whose resources lie in his own self-sufficiency ; and in plain terms he challenges the power of the deceitful deity. He puts words into the mouth of Fortune herself to appease the agitations of her accuser. She reminds him of that imperial freedom—the very essence of her nature—with which she dispenses and withdraws her favors as she will ; and so the dialogue, continuing through three ballads, arrives at length at the point where Fortune turns out to be the executrix of the orders of a righteous Providence, and where the assured repose of heaven appears in its true light as the counterpart to the unavoidable and restless commotion of the world. And

the hope of better days on earth is also open to the poet. "Thy anchor still holds fast," Fortune says to him, "and thou yet mayst land where goodness bears the key to my treasures—and thy best friend lives for thee still." And in the Envoy the goddess begs two or three "Princes" to aid the mourner, or at least to apply to his "best friend" on his behalf.

Whoever that "best friend" may have been, he does not seem to have given him any immediate assistance. For late in the autumn of 1393 we still find the poet in rather doleful circumstances, far from the court, at Greenwich (according to the gloss of one manuscript) alone and forgotten. About that time a friend of Chaucer's, Henry Scogan, who had sometimes been his rival on Parnassus, was in good credit with their Majesties. He lived in their vicinity at Windsor, or, as Chaucer expresses it, he kneeled at the fountain of the stream of grace, honor, and dignity. Master Geoffrey applied to him, praying to be remembered—if it might be of any use. The epistle, which ends with the petition, seems written in the best of spirits, and is full of playfulness. We see how the poet had learned to put aside all melancholy fits. Referring to the terrible rainfall and water-spouts which fell in England in the October of that year, he interprets them as the tears of Venus, incensed at some injurious expression of Scogan's against love. He fears the vengeance of Cupid that may strike all corpulent old fellows, and at the same time he assumes the appearance of a man who has done with all kinds of sport and also with all rhyming. Then in the Envoy he comes to his real object.

This Envoy was probably not without effect; perhaps it brought back to the queen pleasant recollections of the genial poet; at any rate, a few months later the king showed a little interest in him; on February 28th he granted him a pension of twenty pounds a year.

While Richard was thus apparently anxious to restore his favor to the aged Chaucer, his own popularity was rapidly declining. He had not yet thrown aside the mask of reconciliation and moderation, and had taken no decided steps for the satisfaction of his deep, suppressed

passion for revenge and arbitrary rule. But it was now plainly seen that he had not forgotten the services of his old adherents and partisans; he seized eagerly on every opportunity of rewarding them or their relatives for the persecutions they had borne. Indeed, the violent character of the king had even already broken loose from its restraint in a conflict with the city of London, which was, however, soon quieted down again, chiefly by the mediation of the queen.

Many good patriots were estranged from the king as early as 1393. At that date, in the third version of his *Piers Plowman*, Langland had directed words of earnest exhortation and sharp reproach to Richard. Gower, who had finished just a short time previously his *Confessio Amantis*, which had been written at the king's command, now cut out the introduction and ending of his poem with its loyal dedication, its encomiums addressed to the highest quarters, and its hopeful intimations. He dedicated the new edition of his work to John of Gaunt's son, Henry, Earl of Derby, towards whom the eyes of many now began to turn with hope. Henry of Lancaster is now proclaimed by the moral poet as the model of knightly virtue, and is overwhelmed with praise. In the change made at the end Gower also omitted a flattering compliment, with which he had been charged by Venus in the first edition for her disciple and poet Chaucer; this was certainly done by Gower on personal and not political grounds. The Earl of Derby recognized the dedication of the *Confessio* by presenting the author with the Lancastrian collar and badge of the Swan.

On June 7, 1394, Anne of Bohemia died, and in her Chaucer lost a noble patron, and Richard II. his good genius. The sorrow of the king was very great, and was expressed in a strong and touching manner. But when he had got over it, partly by the distractions of a campaign in Ireland, Richard decided to marry again, and sued for the hand of Isabella, daughter of Charles VI. of France, and then only a child. The marriage treaty was ratified at Paris on March 9, 1396; and the coronation of the nine-year-old queen took place at Westminster, January 7, 1397.

This connection was fatal in more respects than one. Old party hatred and slumbering suspicion were aroused again in regard to the king's intentions. The Duke of Gloucester had opposed the marriage with all his might, and made it the occasion for showing the roughest side of his character to the French, and even to his own royal nephew. Richard's evil passions were thus violently aroused, and it soon appeared that the fears with which many had regarded his marriage were only too well founded. Supported by the French alliance, he redoubled his zeal to procure obsequious officials and a servile House of Commons ; he laid aside little by little the restraint he had so long observed, and gave himself up more and more to his desire for revenge and tyranny.

The Duke of Gloucester, and the Earls of Arundel and Warwick, were arrested and accused of high treason for some actions long since past ; and although they had been previously pardoned, Arundel was executed ; Gloucester was tugged across in an old boat to Calais and murdered. Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, was exiled. The laws which had been passed in 1386 and 1387 were rescinded ; in fact all the laws and resolutions which had been carried in the Duke of Gloucester's Parliament were revoked ; on the other hand new and contrary laws were passed, which opened the door to the most arbitrary authority of the king and were made binding for all future time under penalty of high treason. The servility of the Parliament went so far that, at its prorogation, it virtually abdicated by delegating totally new and unheard-of powers to a junta selected from the creatures of the king.

In the meantime the luxury and extravagance of the court had grown to an alarming extent. The arrogance of the young advisers and favorites of the king increased from day to day ; the people groaned under the weight of oppressive taxes.

The present appeared sad, and the future dark ; the worst was the absence of all power of resistance and of all fixedness of principle in the Parliament and in the ranks of the nobility. What was to be the end of this



want of security in legal affairs, when serious men of the highest rank appeared to vacillate in their opinions like reeds before the wind? In such a state of things Chaucer might well feel roused from his contemplative repose. It was probably about this time, perhaps at the beginning of 1398, that he composed his *Ballad to King Richard* on "Steadfastness." He there laments the disappearance of the old principles, of the old fidelity, and the reign of despotism, of party spirit and cruelty; and says, "Truth is put down, reason is held as a fable, virtue has now no authority, pity is exiled, no man shows mercy, greed has blinded the eyes of judgment. . . ." and in a refrain to King Richard he exhorts him strongly: "O Prince, strive to be honorable, cherish thy people and hate extortion, suffer nothing in thy state to be a reproach to thy crown; draw forth the sword of castigation; fear God, observe the laws, love truth and virtue, and marry thy people again to steadfastness."

Well-meant advice! which can have made but small impression, and was perhaps even taken in the sense of an exhortation to continue in the course begun, to suppress the last efforts of an opposition, and to establish permanently the autocracy. But Chaucer could not speak plainer than he had done. How could the poor poet have ventured to approach a prince with direct and personal censure, when the greatest magnates of the land trembled at his whims?—He, the dependent, who was in a measure just kept above water by the royal favor. Exactly at that time, too, all his embarrassments, mostly arising from his pecuniary difficulties, gathered to a climax. At Easter he was threatened with legal proceedings. He was selected by the king to carry out some commissions in the country, but could not venture to leave his house for fear of his opponents and creditors. In these straits, however, he never lost his humor. He sang in ballad form *To his Purse* : \*

To you, my purse, and to noon other wight  
Compleyn I, for ye be my lady dere!  
I am so sory now that ye been lyght,  
For, certes, but-yf ye make me hevvy chere,  
Me were as leef be layde upon my bere.

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\* See Appendix.



For whiche unto your mercy thus I crye,—  
Beeth hevy ageyne, or ellës mote I dye !

Now voucheth sauf this day, or hyt be nyghte,  
That I of you the blissful sounë may here,  
Or see your colour lyke the sunnë bryghte,  
That of yelownesse hadde never pere.  
Ye be my lyfe ! ye be myn hertys stere !  
Quene of comfort and goode companye !  
Beth hevy ageyne, or ellës mote I die !

Now, purse ! that ben to me my lyves lyght,  
And sovëour as doune in this worlde here,  
Oute of this tounë helpe me thrugh your myght,  
Syn that ye wole not bene my tresorere ;  
For I am shave as nye as is a frere.  
But I praye unto your curtesye,  
Beth hevy ageyn, or ellës moote I die !

Tradition asserts, and indeed there is no doubt, that Chaucer found means of bringing this effusion under King Richard's eyes, and that the king gave him assistance, if not in money, in some other ways. On the 4th of May he issued a patent to Chaucer, placing him and his servants and property under the King's special protection, and ensuring him for two years against prosecution of every kind—"if it were not in any way connected with land."

Chaucer could again move freely in the country. About the same time, however, the son of John of Gaunt and Blanche had to leave his native soil. For a long time Richard had heaped his favors on Henry of Lancaster, as well as on his father Gaunt, his uncle York, and his cousin Rutland. On the 29th of September, 1397, he had made him Duke of Hereford, but the new duke did not feel at heart very secure under a king who had shown, although a master in dissimulation, that neither length of time, nor sworn treaties, nor the bonds of blood relationship, could make him turn aside from carrying out his old resentment ; and Richard on his part looked with suspicion on his ambitious cousin, who stole the hearts of the people. A quarrel arose between Hereford and Norfolk, who had been created dukes at the same time. This quarrel could only have arisen in a period of insecurity and lurking suspicion ; it was to be fought

out in a duel on the 28th of April, 1398; but the king made of it a welcome pretext for banishing both dukes from England,—Norfolk for life and Hereford for ten years.

Henceforward Richard ruled with an uncontrolled despotism and a feeling of complete security. There was no longer any limit to, or any protection against, the illegal measures of the king and the creatures who acted in his name. Heavy taxes, unlawful fines, forced loans, extortions of every kind, were required to supply the enormous expenses of the royal household, which contained an immense number of idle loafers, and at the same time to fill the royal treasury.

When the old Duke of Lancaster died on the 3d of February, 1399, Richard called in, without more ado, the letters patent of the banished dukes, just recently granted them for the recovery of their possessions by attorneys-general, and thus seized on the whole inheritance and movables of Henry of Lancaster. This measure made the cup, already full to the brim, to overflow. The exasperation against Richard, and the popularity of Henry, rose to such a height as to overpower all feelings of loyalty in the English people, and Henry himself believed the time for action had arrived.

Whilst the infatuated king was passing his time in a campaign in Ireland to chastise some rebel chiefs and to revenge a cousin's death, the disinherited duke had embarked on his way to England to reclaim his dukedom, and with it the English crown. Contemporary poems, in Latin and in English, reflect the disposition of the people shortly before and after Henry's landing: they show the hopes mixed with joy and fear, the recovery from intolerable oppression, the desire for expiation and for revenge on the ministers and creatures of the king.

The development of these things is known. We are here specially interested only with the impressions Richard's fall made on the most important poets of the century.

Langland was the first to make his voice be heard. The singer of "*Piers Plowman*" had passed a long, eventful life. How many changes and catastrophes he had

seen in politics, and in the fates of great and small, how many changes of system, and what vacillations of opinions and views ! But through all these years, since he first began his prophetic dreams, he had remained singularly true to himself. He had held fast to that which he had once recognized as true and right, and had not deviated from the path of a wise moderation. Notwithstanding his age and increasing conservative precaution, he had never lost his liberal-minded boldness. The horrors of the peasants' insurrection, the abuse that now and then was made of the name of "Piers the Plowman," had not made him deaf to the too-justifiable complaints of the people, nor shaken his faith in his ideals. The evident sores of the church, corruption and schism, had not driven him into the arms of Wiclifism ; but, on the other hand, he had never taken active steps against the Lollards, nor ever spoken for their violent suppression. Wiclifite and socialistic elements had been sometimes united under the flag of his hero : he himself remained unaffected by their fusion. But he had been able also to observe other and more cheering effects of his work. Even some of the moderate disciples of Wiclif had followed in his steps, and learnt from him. To these belonged the poet of *Piers Plowman's Crede*, which was written about the year 1394, when there was great commotion among the Lollards. The *Crede* was a sharp and bitter satire against the mendicant friars, but couched in a true Christian spirit, was in the style and measure of Langland's *Vision*, was well contrived and carried out with broad touches, not without a righteous indignation, but also not without a touch of the mildness and prudence of the master. The tendency of that transparent, half-prophetic allegory of the *Quarrel Between the Griffin and the Pelican* was much more radical and energetic. The Griffin was the representative of the prelates and monks, the Pelican that of real Christianity in Wiclif's sense. At a loss for arguments, the Griffin calls in at last all the birds of prey in order to destroy its rival. The Phoenix, however, comes to the help of the Pelican, and terribly consumes the robber-brood. People were still looking out in vain for the

Phoenix, which was to purify the church, but now it was the Eagle that came flying past, to establish order in the realm—by this heraldic image the poets of the time represented Henry of Lancaster.

The news of Henry's landing and his rapid success had greatly agitated Langland. The report of Richard's capture cut him to the quick. His satisfaction at seeing the day of expiation dawn and the restitution of legal order, struggled in his breast with his sorrow for the unhappy king and his sense of loyalty. The outcome of the present crisis was dark to him, but he considered the moment had arrived for presenting a mirror to King Richard and showing him what he might have been and what he was; by what faults and vices, by what crimes—his own and his accomplices—he had fallen to his present state. This undertaking was most disagreeable to a noble mind; for no palliation could be thought of, and what can be less pleasing than to repeat bitter truths to the unfortunate? The rapid progress of events rendered the work superfluous. The poet was overtaken by the occurrences, and broke off in the middle of his performance, but we can discover, in the fragment thus commenced, the effects of passing events upon the poet. The perception of the need of a radical cure grew with the conviction that such a cure would come, and when the fact was accomplished he was then sure that it had been necessary; and the more the poem goes to the roots of the matter we see—what was unavoidable—that its tone becomes more decided, vigorous, and bold, and Langland, who did not wish to act the part of an apologist of power, thus saw clearly that he ought to write no more.

The fragment *Richard the Redeles* looks almost like a continuation of the Vision of Piers Plowman, of which the weakly drawn outline admits, indeed, of all sorts of amplification. The poet's personality appears quite as clear and important here as in the Vision, nor has he lost any of his excellences of style. Partly by the use of quaint allegories, such as were in common vogue at that time, and with the usual advances, retrogressions, repetitions, and variations, he unrolls to us



strongly marked figures with great truth and acuteness of characterization, extremely vivid, though without much plastic or perspective, intermixed with deep-felt exhortations, surprising apostrophes and parentheses, effective proverbs, and thoughts full of singular profundity. Langland does not mince the matter; but, according to his manner, he spares the king personally as much as possible, and remembers rather his foolish infatuation than his base propensities, rather the evil that he causes than what he does himself. The whole original power of the satirist is revealed in describing the behavior of the courtiers and creatures of the king, or in that typical picture of a Parliament which was summoned for new subsidies. The whole fervor of the poet is seen in passages like that where he portrays the former glory of King Richard's crown—of that crown which was then sought in vain, or like that which gives a thrilling description of the judgment executed by heaven on the criminals.

John Gower showed less tenderness than Langland. The old and often suffering moral preacher had become in the course of time much more decided in his judgments, and also much more surly. Writing had become a habit with him, and so he had from time to time always kept bringing to light some little work on old themes; in Latin distichs or in leonine hexameters he had pounded away, again and again, at the morals of the age, sometimes considering them wholesale, sometimes in detail, sometimes under moral-theological heads, and sometimes from the social point of view. He spared clerics and friars just as little as he had done before; but since the *Confessio Amantis*, wherein he made the first direct assaults on the sect, he treated the Lollards with increasing bitterness. As we have seen, he could not speak well of Richard for some time back. After Richard dropped the mask, after the death of Arundel and Gloucester and the banishment of the Archbishop of Canterbury, his great patron, Gower had completely turned away from the king, whom he henceforth regarded, and rightly, as the real type of the tyrant. He drew his picture plainly enough, although without name,



in a poem where he compares the nature and efficiency of a good and a bad king. This poem was written shortly before the crisis commenced. When the crisis was over, Henry IV. crowned, and Richard dead in prison, Gower addressed the new king not only in French and in Latin verses, but also gave undisguised expression to the whole indignation which had accumulated within him during the past years against the late government, in his *Tripartite Chronicle*. This Chronicle is an impassioned pamphlet in leonine hexameters. The choice and arrangement of the matter corresponded to Gower's compendious and systematic method, and in this case it is calculated for effect. In the first part the poet treats of the events of the years 1387 and 1388; he relates how the noble Lords Gloucester, Arundel, and Warwick put an end to Richard's misgovernment and his unlawful doings, and executed his then ministers and councilors. This he calls "Opus Humanum." In the second part he depicts the vengeance which the king took on these and other like-minded lords, after he had rocked his victims into security by long and deep dissimulation. This is "Opus Inferni." The third part represents the catastrophe and the final punishment of the guilty, *i. e.*, "Opus Divinum." We can imagine the sort of light here thrown respectively on Richard and on Henry. But the chronicler is not satisfied with the natural effect of his strongly colored picture. At the end he pointedly places the vices and crimes of the one against the virtues and good deeds of the other. No language is so appropriate for the expression of boundless detestation and unconditional admiration as the Latin, with its superlative rhetoric, and Gower makes the most of this side of its idiom. In his epithets he goes decidedly too far, especially against Richard, whose tragic fate should have made him more forgiving.

In reference to that fate Chaucer took up the only attitude suited to the nature of things and to his own position. He said nothing. He left it to others to revile in prison, and even in the grave, the king whom he had served, and to whom he was indebted for many a favor. But how could he, on the other hand, bewail the fall of

the despot who had banished Henry of Lancaster and spoiled him of his heritage. It was undoubtedly a joyful event for the poet to see the son of the Duchess Blanche ascending the throne. He very quickly, yet very moderately, gave expression to his satisfaction on the subject, and in an unaffected manner joined thereto a petition to the new king to remember him. On September 30, 1399, Henry of Lancaster was chosen king. Perhaps it was no later than the following day that Chaucer sent him the ballad to his empty *Purse*, composed at the time of his greatest embarrassment, adding to it the following *Envoy*:

O conquerour of Brutes Albyoun,  
Whiche that by lygne and free eleccioun  
Been verray kynge, this song to you I sende,  
And ye that mowen alle myn harme amende,  
Have mynde upon my supplicacioun !

Two days later Henry IV. granted to the petitioner a yearly supplement of 40 marks to the £20 salary given him by Richard.

And thus on the evening of Chaucer's life there fell a ray of princely favor, a final gleam of earthly happiness. The poet still felt abundant vital force and pleasure in living, and doubtless indulged the hope of a long sunset and evening glow. He thought of making himself comfortable for the future; for on the 24th of December he took the lease of a house for fifty-three years in the garden of St. Mary's Chapel, Westminster. Before a year was over his grave had been prepared.

His life had a peaceful, quiet ending, in harmony not only with the world, but with his own soul within. His latest poetical utterance was the ballad on *Truth*—for why should we particularly in this point refuse to admit a credible nucleus to a well-accredited tradition? In the poet's life we have seen periods of joyful, worldly pleasure, religious exaltation, and philosophic resignation alternating with each other. As he neared the final goal he showed still more contentment, calmness, repose; his philosophy was more and more saturated with a religious contemplation, and his religion grew more philosophical. But he remained ever true to the service

of the Muse, who had accompanied all the changeful phases of his life with a glorifying light. His last ballad was the best, because the most pregnant, and flowing most from the depths of his soul :

Fle fro the pres<sup>1</sup> and duelle with sothfastnesse ;<sup>2</sup>  
 Suffice the thy good, through hit be smale  
 For horde hath hate, and clymbyng<sup>3</sup> tikelnesse,<sup>4</sup>  
 Pres hath envye, and wele is blent<sup>5</sup> over alle.  
 Savour<sup>6</sup> no more then the behove shalle ;  
 Rede<sup>7</sup> well thyself that other folke canst rede,  
 And trouthe the shal delyver, hit ys no drede.

Peyne the not eche croked to redresse  
 In trust of hire that turneth as a balle,<sup>8</sup>  
 Grete rest stant in lytil besynesse ;  
 Bewar also to spurn agein an nalle,<sup>9</sup>  
 Stryve not as doth a croke<sup>10</sup> with a walle.  
 Daunte<sup>11</sup> thyselfe that dauntest otheres dede,  
 And trouthe the shal delyver, hit is no drede.

That the is sent receyve in buxumnesse,  
 The wrasteling of this world asketh<sup>12</sup> a falle,  
 Her is no home, her is but wyldyrnesse,  
 Forth, pilgrime ! Forth, best out of thy stalle !  
 Loke up on hye and thonke God of alle ;  
 Weyve thy luste and let thy goste the lede,  
 And trouthe the shal delyver, hit is no drede !

<sup>1</sup> Crowd.<sup>2</sup> Truth.<sup>3</sup> Ambition.<sup>4</sup> Uncertainty.<sup>5</sup> Wealth is deceived.<sup>6</sup> Taste.<sup>7</sup> Counsel.<sup>8</sup> *I. e.*, Fortune.<sup>9</sup> An awl.<sup>10</sup> Earthen pot.<sup>11</sup> Control.<sup>12</sup> Courts.

Chaucer died on the 25th of October, 1400. That which life only gave to him in part, posterity has given him wholly. His grave inaugurated the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, and of that long line of poets he still appears to the present generation as one of the very greatest.

*BOOK V.*

LANCASTER AND YORK.





## I.

There has certainly never been an English poet so far in advance of his times, and whose loss to poetry was therefore so absolutely irreparable, as Chaucer. A presentiment of the importance of the man they mourned had already begun to dawn upon his survivors. Some twelve years after the departure of the master, one of his most faithful worshipers exclaimed : " Death might have stayed his dart for a time ; he might have waited, until thy compeer had arisen. But no ! he was well aware that this island will never produce a man to equal thee ; and he had to execute his office, sooner or later. God gave him the command, I trust for the best. O my master, my master ! God grant rest to thy soul." \*

All that could be hoped for in the immediate future was that the new direction in art which Chaucer had opened up and made visible to all by imperishable monuments should not be forsaken ; that the spirit of his works should be kept alive as much as possible by his disciples and imitators, and spread into still wider circles.

The opening era of the Lancasters seemed to give the best security for the fulfillment of such modest hopes. The founder of the new dynasty, Henry IV., might not be able to devote much personal interest to literature amidst the anxieties of a troublesome reign and severe bodily sufferings ; but nevertheless, to a certain extent, he proved himself the friend of poets. Christine of Pisa, the learned French poetess, came to England on his invitation. In former years he had graciously accepted the dedication of the *Confessio Amantis*, and now as king he was still well disposed to the representatives of the new rising English poetry. His kindness had

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\* Occleve *De Regimine Principum*, ed. Th. Wright, p. 76.

brightened the remainder of the short and clouded evening of the great master's life, who had been his father's favorite and the worthy singer of his mother's memory ; and more than one of the poet's friends and followers had cause to boast of his royal favors. It was at any rate a fortunate circumstance that Henry Scogan was chosen by the king for the education of the royal children—Scogan had been addressed in a familiar strain by Chaucer in a humorous envoy, and had himself made some poetical attempts in the style of his friend. Reverence for the "great poet of Britain" was therefore early implanted in the princes of the house of Lancaster.

The eldest of these,—afterward Henry V.,—while still Prince of Wales, showed much greater interest than his father in literature and science. His uncle, Henry Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, had given him a grounding in classics and a tinge of the humanities. He was a decided friend of books ; this is seen in the elegant get-up and luxurious binding of his volumes. Though he was well acquainted with many Latin authors, he did not neglect those of his own country. He liked his English mother tongue, and preferred it for his correspondence, for his decrees and political instructions ; and even, contrary to the custom of his predecessors, he wished to negotiate with the French in English. We have already seen how much he valued Chaucer's *Troilus*, and this may have been the reason why he induced the most celebrated poet of Chaucer's school to undertake a more comprehensive treatment of the *Tale of Troy*. Other poets also of this school placed their hopes in him and dedicated their works to him.

But everything really depended on the amount of poetic talent surviving in the country, and whether it was sufficiently strong to be able to enter into possession of the heritage left by the master.

Old Gower was still in the land of the living ; and his contemporaries might still expect much from his pen. But the old man belonged to a generation that had passed, and he had really always moved in the same sphere of ideas. He had long since done his best, and was incapable of any further literary achievement. Besides, he

lost his sight in the first year of the new government, and he rightly considered that he might give his pen repose and leave the work of writing to other and younger men. His last verses were addressed to Henry IV. He regards Henry's accession to the throne as an intervention of Providence, and expects the best results to England from his rule; but at the same time he gives him some strong advice. It should be his aim, he says, to restore and preserve peace among Christian kings; on that depends the healing of the church from internal schism, and the protection of Christendom from the attacks of the Saracens.\* A few years later, in 1408, John Gower died.

It is not known how long Chaucer's other friend, Henry Scogan, survived his master. His poetic productions appear, however, not to have been very numerous or very important. All we know of his is one long moral effusion, in eight-line stanzas, with which he edified his royal pupils at a supper given by the London vintners. It contains complaints about his old age and his ill-employed youth, with exhortations to the princes to lead a virtuous life. The interest of the poem consists principally in the fact that it gives in full Chaucer's ballad on "Gentilnesse."

We know by name very few of the younger sympathizers and aspirants who attached themselves to the poet of the Canterbury Tales. The ambition of many of them went no further than occasionally to imitate or continue the works of the master, which they collected and copied. To these belonged SHIRLEY, the indefatigable copier, who continued his useful activity for several decades after Chaucer's death, and to whom we are indebted for much important information about some of the poems he has handed down. Many a time, indeed, he has made to pass under Chaucer's name what is unauthentic or only half authentic, and has thus sometimes given us difficult riddles to solve. We should very much like to know, for instance, how it stands with the continuation of the "Complaint of Dame Pity," which

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\* Address to Henry IV., *Political Poems and Songs*, ed. by Th. Wright, II. 4 ff,

appears in one of Shirley's copies. Different kinds of strophes are there strung on one to another ; sometimes we think we recognize the manner of the great poet himself, sometimes that of an imitator. But what causes the greatest difficulty is a number of ternary rhymes, partly complete and partly mutilated ; did Chaucer ever try his hand at this difficult form, or from whom else can they come ? \*

The works of Chaucer which were continued, interpolated, or imitated, were especially his erotic, didactic, lyric, and allegorical poems, and occasionally also those of religious or historical contents. The early editors appear on the whole to have refrained from putting additions of their own to the great masterpiece, the *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's most eminent disciple ventured, indeed, pretty soon, as we shall see, on a sort of continuation of the *Tales*, but his is rather an independent work. The tendency to complete what was incomplete, to connect what was disconnected, was first begun by later writers, and kept on increasing.

THOMAS OCCLEVE was probably the most intimate with Chaucer of all those really productive writers who undertook large independent works. He had the advantage of his personal instruction and training, and calls him his "dear master and venerable father," and preserved his memory throughout life as a pious heritage.

Occleve was a child of London, and about thirty years younger than "Father Geoffrey." His education and training had been carefully attended to, and would have qualified him better than many others for any office in the church, which he long thought of entering. In 1388, when about eighteen years of age, he received a post as writer to the Privy Seal. Being of a good-natured, sanguine, but light-hearted disposition, he eagerly engaged in all those pleasures to which his age and comrades were addicted, viz., gluttony and drinking till late hours, at which he outdid all his colleagues, and in treating and kissing loose girls. He had a pronounced leaning to good living, and in his boyish pride and vanity

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\* See Appendix.

was much given to extravagance. Out of modesty and bashfulness he did not indulge, indeed, in real debauchery, and his natural timidity also helped to keep him clear of brawls. He afterwards gave a complete and most naïve confession of his youthful aberrations in a poem toward the end of 1406. It appeals in mournful tones "To the Earthly Goddess, Health, the pillar of Life." A few strophes from it may not be inappropriate here :

Wher was a gretter maistir eek than y,  
Or bet acqweyntid at Westmynstre gate ;  
Among the tavernéres namely,  
And cookes ? Whan I cam, eerly or late,  
I pynchid nat at hem in myn acate,  
But paied hem as that they axe wolde ;  
Wherefore I was the welcomer algate,  
And for a verray gentil man yholde.

And if it happed on the someres day,  
That I thus at the taverne hadde be,  
Whan I departe sholde, and go my way  
Hoom to the privie seel, so wowid me  
Hete, and unlust, and superfluitee  
To walken un to the brigge and take a boot,  
That nat durste I contrarie hem all three,  
But dide all that they stired me, God woot.

And in the wintyr, for the way was deep,  
Un to the brigge I dressid me alsó ;  
And ther the bootmen took up on me keep,  
For they my riot knewen fern ago :  
With hem I was y-tuggid to and fro,  
So wel was him, that I with wolde fare,  
For riot paieth largely evere mo :  
He styntith never, til his purs be bare.

Other than maistir callid was I never  
Among this meynee in myn audience ;  
Me thoghte I was y-maad a man for ever ;  
So tikelid me that nyce reverence,  
That it me made larger of despence,  
Than that I thoghte han been. O Flaterie,  
The guyse of thy traiterous diligence  
To folk to mescheef haasten and to hie.\*

The consequences of this ill-regulated conduct on Occleve's purse, as well as on his health, were soon felt.

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\* La Male Regle de Hoccleve, 177-208.



The bodily complaints gradually brought on by his work in the office, viz., stooped shoulders, a stiff back, and weakened sight, were followed by the enervation arising from the habit of overloading his stomach and going late to bed. Occleve had also spent more money than his means allowed; he had incurred debts. It was high time for him to reform and amend his ways, and at the same time most desirable that some one should take care of him. King Henry IV. must therefore have appeared to him as a guardian angel, for in the first years of the new government he allowed him a yearly pension of twenty marks in recognition of faithful services. But it was not long till the joy at this reward was dimmed. An act of Parliament in 1405 ordered the stopping of all pensions recently granted; and it is seen in the above-mentioned poem that Occleve, among others, was affected by this measure, for its last strophe appeals to Lord Furnival, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, to pay the poet at least that part of his pension due for the previous half year. Later on also we see Occleve repeatedly striving with the difficulty of obtaining the grant. Chaucer's embarrassment in pecuniary affairs seems to have been inherited by his disciples, and Occleve had occasion, like his master, to sing to his "Empty Purse." His situation became still more precarious when he had definitely to give up all hope of a benefice, after waiting long in vain, and when he had been married—and that purely for love. In severe distress and gnawing care for the future, he undertook his principal work, *De Regimine Principum*, by which he hoped to gain the favor of the Prince of Wales. This hope was not deceived; but nevertheless there does not appear to have been any decided improvement in his situation during the reign of Henry V. The old effort was still renewed, the poet had again and again to petition for the payment of his annuity, and, in the reign of Henry VI., he appears still in debt. Occleve lived on, it seems, till nearly the middle of the fifteenth century. In his old age he found a patron and supporter in the "Great Duke of York."

Such straitened circumstances, such paltry cares and

interests, could not conduce to the development of his talents, which did not, indeed, rise above the average. Occleve had a certain humorous vein, as we see particularly in his "Confessions," the frankness of which helps to reconcile us to the weaknesses of the man. But neither his humor nor his philosophy was strong or deep enough to raise the poet permanently above the miseries of daily life. The strong sprinkling of non-idealized subjective elements lends to his poems a very essential part of their charm, but it also shows us some of the causes which prevented him from rising to higher flights.

Occleve is a good, harmless fellow, who has read with advantage many books, has observed correctly all sorts of things within the circle of his experience, and has thought much. To this must be added the gift of easy poetic composition, and a decided talent for form, which he happily modeled on Chaucer's style. In the clearness of his diction, and occasionally in the excellent choice of his expressions in the construction of his verses and stanzas, he comes nearer to the great model than almost any of the poets of the fifteenth century. Everywhere we can trace the influence of the master, without being able to call it mere imitation. Direct reminiscences are very seldom used in a wrong place. Occleve has his own style ; he does not attempt a rivalry with the style of his model, which is pithy, forcible, vivid, and significant in every line, but he knows how to ingratiate himself easily with his readers, both to their pleasure and profit. In the long run, indeed, the want of any strong colors in his broad descriptions becomes insipid.

The poet can relate clearly and distinctly, although, as a rule, without much effect, and he has treated with tact subjects from the *Gesta Romanorum* ; of such are the Tale of Jonathas and that of the Chaste Spouse of the Emperor Gerelaus (for Merelaus]. In the latter he has used the same subject as in Chaucer's "Custance," with the great model before him, and in the same kind of stanza. He has also had happy moments in his occasional poems, and, if we may say so, in his lyrical pro-

ductions ; but here he seldom knows when he has said enough, or when to stop ; his so-called ballads pay as little regard to the inner laws of lyric poetry as to the conventional rules of art. As a moralizing, didactic poet, he has at his command plenty of means of expression for truths—sound, indeed, but no longer new ; and his very facility in this domain has certainly, on the whole, injured his work. The regret he felt for his past life made him cultivate the didactic tendency of that age more than really suited his own individuality ; and as this sort of didactic matter came so easily to hand, he began at last to take a pleasure in it. But his strength lies rather in the representation of things and circumstances which he has seen with his own eyes, where a happy observation and a slight touch of ironical roguery many a time produce a pretty *genre* picture, and where his satire, within moderate limits, is fairly successful. But he sometimes rises into real eloquence when he sings the praise of women ; for he had at heart a deep reverence for the sex, however much he might know about their weaknesses ; and it is where this adoration is interblended with religious sentiments that he strikes the highest key. This is seen as early as the year 1402, when he wrote his *Cupid's Letter*, an apology for women ; it discusses, in a somewhat too pedantic form, certain pretty thoughts, mixed with others not so good. The most important strophes are those which sing the strength of women's faith and their approved fidelity to the Saviour. We must here mention in particular that prayer, breathing the deepest and most touching fervor and contrition, to the Virgin,—“*Moder of God*,”—whose intercession the poet specially requires to overcome his sensual impulses. Several of the church prayers, including the *Intemerata*, are here worked up with a free and sure hand, and fused into one poetic whole, in which the breadth of outline, the fullness of description, and the plainness of concrete expression, come equally to the front. In this case Occleve vies successfully with his master Chaucer, to whom—on the authority of an Edinburgh manuscript—the poem has been long attributed.\*

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\* See Appendix.

The work which permanently supports the fame of Occleve—*The Governail of Princes*—was written in 1411 or 1412. It is for the most part an imitation of the work composed by Ægidius Romanus for Philip the Fair of France, the "*De Regimine Principum*," of which it has taken the title. But, besides this treatise, he has utilized the "*Secretum Secretorum*," as well as a moralizing dissertation on chess by the Dominican Jacobus de Cassolis, and from all three works he has selected freely. The idea of writing a sort of "*Mirror for Princes*" for the Prince of Wales, afterwards Henry V., was certainly a happy one. Henry's turn of mind was decidedly practical, even in literature. He had closely studied Vegetius—and not without advantage for his military campaigns, as was afterwards apparent. And, as the poet assumes, Henry had already made acquaintance with the Latin text of those writings from which Occleve here offered him a sort of anthology in well-constructed English verses, and in a strophe with which the prince had previously become familiar from *Troilus*. But that age differs widely from ours, in the advantage it expected from direct moral instruction. Occleve fulfilled his task with praiseworthy tact. He brings all the virtues that a prince should have in succession to Henry's mind; he addresses him repeatedly; he illustrates his doctrines with numerous examples from history, sacred and profane; and he understands withal cleverly to intermix praises and exhortations. The expectations which he set on Henry's future rule appear to us somewhat prophetic; but this, indeed, is less a merit of the prophet than of the prince.

In this narrative Occleve is fond of making digressions and additions. To the old examples taken principally from the Bible, classical writers, and church fathers, he adds all the modern traditions of his own country. He frequently refers to well-known personages in English history, to Edward III., John of Gaunt, and his father-in-law, Henry of Lancaster; he often dwells with a censuring or complaining tone upon conditions, customs, abuses of his country and his age. Nor does the poet forget himself. The popular story of John Canace, who by his slyness made up for his former foolishness and



saved himself from the fate of a Lear, brings vividly to his mind the useful truth that nothing is so foolish as to throw away one's own money in the hope of gratitude from others, and reminds him of the sins of his own youth. Now, indeed, he will repent of these, he says, and will take care in future not to relapse into old faults ; only the prince ought to help him, and see to it that his pension be paid !

The most attractive side of this poem is the personal and the historical details ; both of these are for the most part contained in the long prologue, which is therefore the most interesting portion of the poem. Occleve here places himself before us in his sorrow and anxiety for the future, and describes his meeting with a poor old man. The old man had spent his youth in the same loose sort of living as the poet, or indeed even worse ; but he has become wise and virtuous through misfortune and poverty, and has thus learned a keen sympathy for men. And so he strives to show his interest in the poor Occleve. But his efforts to draw the poet into conversation are at first in vain. Only by degrees does he succeed in winning the ear and confidence of the poet ; and then in a long conversation of wide scope, on things personal and universal, concrete and abstract, he offers him consolation and advice. It is to him, of course, that Occleve is indebted for the happy thought of applying his poetic talents to the alleviation of his distress, and of dedicating a poem to the Prince of Wales.

The chief feature in the poet's character is his humane, benevolent, though somewhat weak and timorous, disposition. That he should love peace and preach it, and even feel a sympathy for unhappy France, the national foe, is quite in accordance with his nature. It is characteristic of his age that he also should have entertained the idea of a new crusade. This idea, which seemed doomed to a tragic death and had flared up once more before its final extinction, runs through the whole reign of Henry IV. and his successor. But in the background we perceive another and more dismal light glimmering through the baleful clouds of smoke ; we see the sombre glare of the blazing funeral piles on which



Wiclif's followers are burned. The good-natured Occleve would like to see them saved from such a fate, by their repentance ; otherwise he considers it a just punishment for their deplorable stiff-neckedness.

And his orthodox zeal grew from year to year. When Henry V. was at Southampton in August, 1415, on his way to war with France, Occleve thought of the once-honored knight, Sir John Oldcastle, now an outlawed heretic and rebel living hidden somewhere in Wales. In an extremely long-winded poem, which was certainly intended for the eyes of the king as much as for the knight's, he calls upon Sir John beseechingly to give up his sinful errors, to repent, and to submit. He leaves no means of persuasion or warning untried, none of the customary arguments in religious controversy undiscussed, no motive of a spiritual or secular nature unexpressed. Should a knight, he says, lie hidden now among a miserable people—now when glory in the war was to be won ? Is it the business of a knight to dispute about the secrets of religion or to investigate the Bible ? Let him read the story of Lancelot of the Lake, of Troy, or Thebes, or even Vegetius on the art of chivalry. And if it must be the Bible, let him choose the book of Judges or Kings, of Joshua, Judith, or Maccabeus—that would be the proper diet for a knight.

Occleve appears as an ultramontane of the purest water when he speaks of those two lights which God has placed in the firmament—the sun to represent the papal power, and the moon the power of the king ! Worst of all is the unflinching harshness the poet now shows against the heretics. For Sir John Oldcastle he has a certain respect, on account of his rank and former demeanor ; but he treats the great crowd of Wiclifites only the more contemptuously, and reproaches them with having seduced the knight. “ Come on, if you will ! ” he cries ; “ our victory is assured, for God is on our side. And if we die, we go to heaven, but you shall go to hell. And yet our love is so great that we desire you to repent.”

In another poem,\* written about 1416, Occleve calls

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\* See Appendix.

upon the king as well as the lords and knights of the Garter to suppress heresy in the land with all their might.

If we now compare Occleve's standpoint with that of his master, we can understand at once why the fifteenth century could not possibly produce a work like the *Canterbury Tales*.

A few years before the composition of *The Governail of Princes*, another poet of Chaucer's school, a certain CHAPLAIN JOHN,\* had translated Boëthius's "*De Consolatione Philosophiæ*" into eight-lined stanzas. The translator shows a considerable command over rhythm and poetical language. We see, also, that besides the original he had Chaucer's prose version before him, which gave him a greater facility in the choice of expression. Many reminiscences of Chaucer's poetic diction are also found, especially of such compositions and passages as were influenced by Boëthius. On the whole, Chaplain John's production is not very attractive: one does not care to see the prose of Boëthius and the varied measures of his poetry transferred here into a uniform and rather monotonous vagueness of poetic expression.

A translation was made, about this time, of the poem *De Re Rustica*, of Palladius Rutilius Taurus Æmilianus. The Latin compiler has drawn his lessons on the management of houses and gardens largely from Vitruvius and Columella; his distichs are replaced in the English text by Chaucer's seven-lined stanza, which the unknown poet knows well how to handle. It is not known for certain whether he translated the whole fourteen books of the original, for the only manuscript we now have of it is incomplete.†

Didactic poetry was then the order of the day; and the spirit of teaching is maintained even in the works of the most productive and multifarious poet of his century—JOHN LYDGATE.

\* In a MS. adduced by Todd, "*Illustrations of Gower and Chaucer*," p. xxxi, he is named in full Capellanus Johannes Tebaud alias Watyrbeche.

† It includes book I. (containing regulations of a general nature) as well as books ii. to xi. (January to October) complete, and a considerable part of the following book. There is thus wanting a part of November, the whole of December and the fourteenth book, "*De Insitionibus*."

Lydgate was born in the village of Lydgate, in Suffolk, six or seven miles from Newmarket. He became a sub-deacon in 1389, and must therefore have been about the age of Occleve, or only a little younger. He was made deacon in 1393, and priest in 1397. He belonged to the Benedictine order of friars and lived in their Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds, which he appears to have entered at a very tender age. His traditional biography speaks of his having studied at Oxford, of a subsequent journey to France and Italy, and of a school of rhetoric and poetry which he opened in the monastery for the sons of the nobility after his return. These statements, however, are without sufficient authority, and they labor under the difficulty—at least the Italian journey,—of internal improbability. Lydgate assuredly possessed a certain amount of learning, understood French and Latin, had read much in both languages, and also knew the Latin works of authors like Petrarch and Boccaccio.

As a poet the monk of Bury excelled the writer to the Privy Seal in London, not only in fertility, but also in many other qualities, and was inferior to him in only one point, though a very essential point. His sensitive faculty was more powerfully developed, his perception stronger and more general, his productions more spontaneous. On the other hand his taste was less refined; the ideal of style, after which he groped, never became quite clear to him, and the demands he made upon himself became, therefore, less and less as time went on.

Lydgate was never made for the clerical profession, and still less for the monkish life. The confessions in his "Testament" give us a picture of his childhood and early youth. He was anything but a model boy; he was, on the contrary, the genuine type of a madcap, and something more. We receive the impression of such unmanageable vigor, that we regret the discipline which strove to suppress it, instead of guiding it into its proper course. Even during his first years in the cloister his conduct was far from exemplary, and he can scarcely have entered it of his own inclination. The hour of his conversion came; yet even after that he must have often had great difficulty in struggling with his worldly tendencies,

in accustoming himself to subordination, in bridling his curiosity, in closing his ears to "profane fables," and in turning his whole attention to the "stories of the Saints." Lydgate was of an honorable and conscientious disposition in spite of his youthful tricks; after his conversion he took seriously to his calling, and in the course of time became more pious and spiritual. But it did not end without numerous compromises, and these were fatal to his poetic development. He thought he could indulge his inclination for worldly fables under the condition of drawing from them a really edifying moral. His pious intentions made him express the same thoughts and sentiments again and again. As his age increased, he turned more and more exclusively to religious subjects.

His literary studies gave him a pedantic tinge. Many of the books he read were of a decidedly monkish character, and most were more or less exclusively didactic. He seemed to think a monk might just as well be a literary man as an ecclesiastical preacher; and so he began to take a pleasure in the varnish of learning.

His acquaintance with Chaucer and his poetry was in a certain sense injurious to him. Many things in Chaucer were congenial to his inmost nature; other things corresponded to his position, or his second nature, which he appropriated with difficulty; very much lay beyond his horizon, but that was only so much the more admired, and striven after in vain.

Lydgate had by nature the material for the making of an able, popular poet; he had an epic, worldly frame of mind, a solid, manly nature, was by no means devoid of the tender sentiments, had a clear and correct observation, and a cultivated taste for the beauties of nature. He was deficient in striking originality, in width of view, in mental depth and acuteness, which are absolutely necessary to the artistic poet if he is to rise above mediocrity.

Now, when he was about entering manhood, he made the acquaintance of Chaucer's works. He came into personal contact with the great poet, and was his friend. He wrote a poem under Chaucer's direct guidance. The art of the master impressed him powerfully; the im-



mense superiority of Chaucer's poems over the productions of other English poets became all of a sudden clear to him. In Lydgate, poet and monk were united in admiration of Chaucer, and in energetic efforts to imitate him. This could not easily be done ; for the two parts of his nature, poet and monk, were in continual strife, and the poet in himself would have been unable to wield the club of Hercules. Even before the first step lay an unbreakable barrier, viz., the poetic form. Lydgate had a quick perception for verbal and musical harmony, such as is seen in the simple, old-fashioned rhythms and melodies. But he never fathomed the secret of the charm that hovers over Chaucer's verses, and was never able to attain that freedom and security of movement whose bounds were so artistically drawn. He never understood—or at least never really appropriated—even the elementary principle of Chaucer's verse, viz., that blending of the rigorous enumeration of syllables of romantic poetry with that melody of rhythm so pleasing to the English ear. In this point the monk of Suffolk was far outdone by the London writer, who breathed the same air as his master, and who had used almost the same speech from birth. The more arid Occleve goes securely on his way, and we read his verses with a quiet pleasure ; Lydgate, endowed by nature with a much more musical soul, appears to stumble every moment, so that in reading him we feel again and again as if thrown out of the saddle.

The same thing happens in his diction, and, indeed, in all he did. Lydgate possesses a great facility of poetic expression, and frequently hits the proper word. His memory, however, is so prodigious, and his admiration for Chaucer so great, that he is continually reproducing turns and verses from his works, and these generally seem rather queer in their surroundings. But it is worse when the disciple wishes to imitate the master also in those things which only the most accomplished talent is able to execute gracefully. Chaucer often constructs rather complicated sentences, which are, nevertheless, always easily understood ; when Lydgate attempts anything of this sort he invariably gets confused in the



construction. Chaucer's easy and agreeable diffuseness degenerates in Lydgate into intolerable loquacity, his naïveté into platitudes, his bright reflective moralizing tone into pedantry. Almost all the externals of the model are exaggerated or applied in the wrong place by the imitator—such as astronomical determinations, mythological machinery, learned allusions, the employment of prologues, the invocation, and more of the sort.

We do not mean to say that the disciple got no real good from the master. On the whole, however, the impression is produced that Lydgate's talent was more injured than aided by the overwhelming influence of Chaucer, as also by his own monachism and learning.

In his poems there is much that is good, and even excellent of its kind. He is, however, so very variable that he has scarcely produced any work of greater length, and only a few short ones, which leave a pure, uniform impression. He never acquired any original style, but rather a sort of mannerism, in which he at length appears to have taken a sort of pleasure, and in which at least he could express his thoughts as rapidly as water from a sponge.

His productiveness was so enormous in quantity, and so many of his works are still unprinted, or only extant in old editions of difficult access, that an exhaustive exposition and full appreciation of this poet is not yet possible to the literary critic.

The *Troy-Book* is probably one of the earliest of Lydgate's longer poems. It is a manipulation of Guido's "*Historia Trojana*," and was undertaken on the command of Henry V., towards the end of his father's reign; it was completed in the spring of 1421. There is no doubt but the popularity of the *Tale of Troy* in England was largely due to Chaucer's *Troilus*. If there was an English imitation of Guido's *History* before this masterpiece,—which is possible, but very doubtful,—there were at least several attempts of the kind in the half century that followed.\* Of these Lydgate's version has become the most famous, although it is as little distinguished as the others by any special independence in the treatment.

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\* See chapters xi. and xii. of this book.

In fact Lydgate follows his authority so closely in all essential and positive points, that he can only claim as his property the small details of execution and poetic expression ; and in these things he did not succeed any better here than afterwards, at least in his other great works. His feeling for nature is often brilliantly expressed in charming descriptions and beautiful images. Psychological conditions and phenomena are sometimes vividly portrayed. He also shows a decided talent for graphic delineation in his elaborate descriptions of feasts, buildings, and the like, which gives his work a great archæological interest. His diffusiveness and verbosity indeed frequently produce a certain distracting pedantry. Lydgate himself often destroys the effect of beautiful passages by insipid additions. On the whole, however, his style is seen here in a favorable light. This refers also to his versification and his management of the heroic couplet which is here employed. But even in the *Troy-Book* Lydgate does not stick too closely to Chaucer's rule; and although some of his deviations might be considered as a justifiable extension of too narrow limits, this is not the case with all. This license, however, refers specially to the Romanic elements in the system. His appreciation for rhythmical melody appears to have been purer and more vivid than afterwards, and his verses are frequently constructed not only with genuine power, but often even with a real harmony.

Just as the *Troy-Book* seems inspired by Chaucer's *Troilus*, so the poem which shortly followed it, the *Story of Thebes*, is connected with the *Knight's Tale*. The poem is intended as a continuation of the *Canterbury Tales*. The monk of Bury, now nearly fifty years of age, who has just recovered from sickness and is still very meagre, meets the pilgrims at Canterbury—by a very naïve anachronism. He is addressed by the Host, Harry Baily, asked to join the company, and to relate a story on the following morning when they are starting home. The return journey of the pilgrims is therefore to be opened by the *Tale of Thebes*, just as the outward pilgrimage had been opened by the *Knight's Tale*, which supplied many references to the other.

Lydgate's subject goes back to the "Thebais" of Statius; he did not take this, however, for the basis of his poem, but a version derived from it. The Latin original had been worked over by a French poet of the twelfth century, to suit the taste of his age, into a "Romance of Thebes," and his production was afterwards changed into prose more than once. We have to seek Lydgate's real source among these French prose versions. At the same time Boccaccio's writings on the Genealogy of the Gods and on Celebrated Women supplied hints which were eagerly utilized. In the technical parts of his story the English poet very closely imitates the Canterbury Tales—especially the Knight's Tale. We often meet not only with evident reminiscences, but also with whole passages taken over literally. And although Lydgate shortens his French original in many places, he occasionally enlarges very considerably without gaining any epic fullness for his story. Quite the contrary, indeed; for the whole has the character of a rather dry chronicle-like tale, in spite of its great extent. The immense difference between disciple and master is most strikingly seen in the prologue, where his dependence on the master is also the most evident. Lydgate appears here almost as Chaucer's ape. After what we have said it is of course understood that the poem is written in the heroic couplet. But here the faultiness of the verse is no less remarkable, although this is owing partly—but not entirely—to the careless way in which it has been handed down.

A few years after the completion of the *Story of Thebes*, in the winter of 1424–25, Lydgate began a much longer poem, indeed a work of enormous dimensions—viz., his *Falles of Princes*. This was perhaps the most toilsome task he ever undertook, and it consumed a considerable portion of his life. He was over sixty years of age when he gave the finishing touches to the work which had cost him many a sigh.

Boccaccio's work on the "Fates of Celebrated Men" had inspired Chaucer with the tragic pictures in the Monk's Tale, which gives, however, no just idea either of the form or the contents of the Latin original. What the

monk of the Canterbury Tales omitted, the monk of Bury undertook. By this work he executed a commission of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who was an ardent promoter of science and the study of the humanities. Boccaccio's work was of a nature to please the taste of an age in touch with antiquity, but not yet of a very refined taste. The fondness for antique legends and tales and learned digressions, as well as the fancy for allegory, moral and philosophical discussion, all these found equally their satisfaction in his work. The tragic undertone of the whole, the prevailing pathos, the strongly applied colors, suited the character of an age which needed strong excitement and was accustomed to contemplate gloomy pictures. Boccaccio knew how to give variety to a subject which was really monotonous in spite of the diversity of the characters ; he knew, at times, how to interrupt in a rather clever way the placing together of his most celebrated personages, and to enliven his story by a dramatic element ; he thus ensured for it complete success.

When Lydgate began his work, the original had been already twice translated into French ; and on both occasions by Laurent de Premierfait, who had read sufficient to be a good translator, but was wanting in æsthetic delicacy. The latest of these prose versions, finished in the year 1409, was a free paraphrase, and rather disguised than enriched the original work by numerous additions ; it was this version Lydgate took for his model. He used it with considerable freedom, striking out a good deal, though by no means enough, but adding, on the other hand, all sorts from his own learning. Among the various sources from which he drew his motives and leading features, he utilized the Bible, and next Ovid, with the most success. Differing from his French predecessor, who had written prose, Lydgate could only think of a poetic treatment of the whole, for which, indeed, it was excellently adapted. And the poet was as if born for a work of this sort : it made no demands beyond his power to perform, but appealed specially to certain sides of his nature, and was thoroughly consistent with his education and position in life. Lydgate fixed on Chau-



cer's seven-lined stanza for his metrical form, and only in the moralizing portions occasionally changed it for the eight-lined. His versification here is much better than in the Tale of Thebes, and indeed in many passages it is excellent. His gift of vigorous and graphic expression, his talent for description, and his pathos, come out effectively in this subject. The poet indeed grows weary more than once at his endless labor, and hence we find long, barren tracts, especially towards the conclusion of the work. Taken all together, however, it bears the palm among Lydgate's greater poems, and in the eye of literary history is undoubtedly his most important production. We therefore read with pleasure in the very prologue of this poem that enthusiastic praise of his master Chaucer, and that heartfelt and sorrowful complaint for his death.

Numerous small poems had in the meantime flowed from Lydgate's pen, and continued to do so—viz., ballads, complaints, tales, fables, hymns, invocations, legends, and whatever else has a name. The versatility of the poetic monk was ready for anything; he never learned Boileau's precept of composing painfully. Whether the Earl of Warwick, as lieutenant for the Regent (the Duke of Bedford, who was at Paris), gave him an order for a political pamphlet, or whether an abbot or some pious soul required a saint's legend, or whether it was a question of celebrating the coronation of Henry VI., or his entry into London, or begging money from the Duke of Gloucester, for whom he had put in verse the "Falles of Princes,"—Lydgate's muse was always ready and willing. Sometimes he wrote a pious prayer; sometimes he sent a keen satire to a princess on the prevailing style of women's head-dress; sometimes he wrote an English "Dance of Death"; sometimes he sang advice, praise, encouragement, congratulation to any noble lord, or to a friend. Lydgate, indeed, seldom waited for the moment of inspiration, and did not look closely to the requirements which the subject and kind of poetry made upon his humor and style.

Unlike the French poets, he only seldom confined himself to the artificial rules of the Meistersingers in



the construction of his ballads ; and, what was worse, he seldom saw the necessity of changing the metre and tone to suit the subject of his poems.

The poetic form he most frequently employs is the stanza of seven or eight lines of ten syllables—seven lines, generally, for his epic works, and eight, chiefly, for his lyrics, yet without any rigorous distinction between the species. He can write either stanza with ease, and even pleasingly, if we except occasional inequalities in the construction of his verse. He seldom knows, indeed, how to go the right way to work with them ; his diction often moves dull and dragging through the rhythmical system. But sometimes he employs shorter lines for his strophes and thus secures a greater vivacity for his expressions.

A great number of Lydgate's occasional poems have more historical than poetical value—especially his congratulations, begging-petitions, dedications, valedictories, and his descriptions of feasts, and the like.

His position as monk imposed on him a certain reserve in the domain of erotic poetry, though, indeed, more in his later years than earlier. This epic-lyric class, which had been so happily cultivated by Chaucer on the example of Machault and Froissart, was also tried by Lydgate. His talent was fairly qualified for a popular form of the "Complaint"—a sort of long monologue, interwoven with allegory and mythology, and introduced by a charming picture of nature. His *Complaint of the Black Knight*,\* which contains reminiscences from the Romance of the Rose, the Boke of the Duchesse, and the Parlement of Foules, was long considered a production of Chaucer's, and is still frequently included in editions of his works—although with reservations. The critic, however, will not be deceived by the excellent descriptive passages of this poem, but will easily detect the characteristic marks of the imitator in the management of verse and rhyme, and especially in the diffusiveness of the story and the monotony even of the most important parts.

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\* The Complaint of the Black Knight, as it is called in the old prints ; but more correctly in the manuscript, the Complaynte of a Lovers Lyfe. But see Appendix.

Lydgate is, above all, a moralist and satirist, and as such he often attains to an energetic and striking expression, especially when he is compelled by the form of verse to a wholesome restriction. He also knows how to crowd a number of details into a single strophe with effect, just as Chaucer did so excellently in his ballad on "Truth"; he can heap up proverbs, dicta, or even traits of character, and express their result or inmost thought in the concluding line in a most effective refrain.

He proves himself a moralist also in his *Tales and Fables*; but here the didactic element is often far too long, while his independence very seldom comes emphatically to the front. The Tale of "December and July" is entirely under Chaucer's influence, as well as the warning Epistle of a philosopher to his old friend desiring to marry, in which the Tale is inserted.\* Like the Tale of "January and May," this whole Epistle is founded on the "Confessions" of the Wife of Bath. Lydgate's *Æsop*, or collection of fables, has little attraction; it is probably derived from Marie de France. Judging from the extreme prolixity of the description, especially at the beginning, and from the quantity of misplaced learning, we cannot regret that the poet threw the work aside after having written the prologue and seven fables. The independent fable of the *Horse, Goose, and Sheep* has some very successful traits and many interesting details for the history of culture, but is also, on the whole, wearisome.

Lydgate appears perhaps in his best light in the Tale of the *Peasant and the Bird*, which is taken from a French story drawn from the *Disciplina Clericalis*. The language sometimes here attains a real musical harmony, and the subject has a touching symbolism. The complaint of the imprisoned bird reminds us of the poet's fate, whose splendid talents, confined on every side, must pine away, and who, alas! unlike the bird, could not succeed in escaping from his prison for the sunny heights.

Lydgate's relationship to women is worthy of remark.

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\* Lydgate's *Minor Poems*, ed. J. O. Halliwell, p. 27 ff.

When, following the footsteps of his master, he sometimes pictures marriage as a heavy yoke, and husbands as pitiable victims ; when, like the Clerk in the *Canterbury Tales*, he says that he has met with only one Griselda, and she is long since dead,\*—we cannot greatly blame the honest monk for this. But almost everywhere in his satirical expressions about women we can only see his love for them. Lydgate was attracted quite as much as Chaucer by the womanly nature; and the energy with which he attacks in his *Troy-Book* that grim woman-hater, Guido, has quite a touching and agreeable effect. It lay in the nature of things that he could only develop freely his worship of woman in the domain of religion.

Lydgate's *Religious Poems* alone would fill a goodly volume. Many are the Saints he has celebrated in his songs, many the miracles and legends he has told in dainty strophes. In this domain, also, he could take Chaucer chiefly for his model. In a manner evidently influenced by the Prioress's Tale, Lydgate related the miracle which, according to Vincent de Beauvais, the Virgin Mary performed on her pious worshiper, the monk Joos, immediately after his death. And the *Margaret Legend*, composed on the command of Lady March, from French and Latin sources, reminds us not less clearly of the "Life of Saint Cecilia." But, unlike his master Chaucer, Lydgate was not able in the long run, even in his devout poems, to refrain from his literary pretensions, however much he might deny it, nor from clerical tendencies ; and his overproduction tended here also to the detriment of his convenient technics. His tale of the Wiltshire *Priest Wulfrik*, and that of the *Monk of Paris*, both written to recommend prayers for the dead, are distinguished among his *contes dévots* for their agreeable shortness and simplicity ; but in a later tale, viz., *St. Augustin at Compton*, the poet makes a pretty long run. He succeeded well in bringing out the grewsome element of his subject ; but we could gladly have done without the learned theological intro-

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\* *Minor Poems*, p. 133.

duction, which deduces the moral of the fable in an ecclesiastical sense—viz., the duty of the layman to pay his tithes ; many a reader would willingly have waived the classical comparison of the Apostle of the Angles with Aurora. Lydgate deserves all honor for having preferred national subjects for his legendary poems ; yet we have greatly to regret that his manner of treatment drifted more and more from the popular form as he advanced in years. The legendary portion in the tale of the much-sung *Guy of Warwick* offered him a splendid theme. It is not astonishing that the poetic monk should have taken this subject from a Latin chronicle instead of from the Roman poetry ; but it is remarkable that he should have been able to make so absolutely nothing out of it. His story is extremely dull and heavy, without poetic elevation, in spite of Aurora, Phœbus, and the Fates ; so that when the author assures us in the final strophe that he has never plucked flowers in Cicero's garden nor wandered in the meadows of Homer, we have really no cause to question his statement.

It was easy for the wordy poet and learned friar to improve his legendary poems in such a way as to extend this species to larger and almost epic proportions.

The diligence he showed in this direction is especially attested by three monuments :

His *Life of the Virgin Mary*, dedicated to Henry V., together with much insipidity and protracted dullness, contains at least some attractive details—such as beautiful passages and brilliant pictures, which show us that this poem belongs to Lydgate's best period.

The poet's power was evidently diminishing when he undertook the work which his pious contemporaries considered one of his most important productions. In the year 1433 the young king, Henry VI., celebrated his Christmas feast with great pomp at Bury, and remained there till Easter, in contemplative retirement, in the house which he himself had founded. At his departure he was received into the chapter of his foundation. In order to bind the king still closer to the cloister of St. Edmund, the Abbot, William Curteis, determined to dedicate to him the life of the patron saint in English,



in an elegant copy with splendid miniatures, and he commissioned Lydgate to write the text. Don John acquitted himself of his task with a most praiseworthy zeal. He composed a long, comprehensive poem in three books, which set forth not only the legend of *Edmund*, the chaste king and martyr of the East Angles, but also, in a continuation, the legend of his nephew *Fremund*, king of Mercia, who avenged his uncle's death and likewise won the martyr's crown. The tale ends with a description of the miracles which were wrought at St. Edmund's tomb; but to these general contents we have now to add prologues, invocations, envoys all richly set off with oratorical drapery, for Lydgate neglected nothing to prove himself worthy of the subject and the occasion. But however much all this display might impress his brethren in the monastery and the pious youth upon the English throne, it cannot greatly enhance the attractive power of the poem for a modern reader; for his rhetoric hardly ever rises to the sphere of poetry, and the prolix narrative scarcely ever hits the real epic tone. His expressions may even gain at times a certain strength and roundness, but the real breath of life is wanting to make the heavy, dragging tale proceed.

The success of the poem on *Edmund*, raised equally the fame of the Abbey of Bury and of its patron saint, and may possibly have stirred up the learned and munificent Abbot of St. Alban's, John Whethamstede, to wish for a similar work on the patron saint of his own monastery. His monks probably participated this time in his wish, although they had formerly sometimes reproached him, but unjustly, with neglecting the interests of the Abbey in his devotion to books. Whethamstede applied to Lydgate in the year 1439, and the poet, now well stricken in years, declared his readiness to execute the commission. Without any misgivings he plunged into his subject and produced another long legendary poem, in three books, on the same plan as his "*Edmund*." And just as he had attached St. Fremund to the hero of the poem on "*Edmund*," so now to the poem on St. Albanus, the protomartyr of Britain, he attached Amphibalus, who had converted him and died a martyr shortly



after Albanus himself. The style and tone in *Albon and Amphabell* also remind us strongly of the previous legend, although all clearness and simplicity of diction seem gradually evaporating with the advancing years of the valiant, hoary-headed bard.

The great work for St. Alban's did not mark by any means the end of the poet's career ; but we can follow him no farther. Lydgate's life and poems can be traced up to the year 1446, and it is possible that he still enjoyed for a considerable time after this date the pension which Henry had granted him—perhaps as a reward for his "Edmund"—from the taxes of Norfolk and Suffolk ; in any case it is probable that he survived his patron Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who met his death in February, 1447, at Bury St. Edmunds, too, and in a manner never yet explained.

## II.

We shall here interrupt our consideration of the artificial poetry which followed in Chaucer's wake, in order to turn at length to that branch of composition which in the Middle Ages could boast of no very refined cultivation, but which was destined in the first centuries of the modern era to produce its most glorious blossoms—we mean dramatic poetry.

In the period we are here considering the English drama had already a long history behind it. We must now reach back to note the most important epochs of this early drama, which was almost solely occupied with religious plays.

The cradle of the mediæval drama was the Church. This is well known. The Roman Catholic Liturgy contained a multitude of germs for the formation of a drama, and still contains them, though in a smaller degree than before : songs alternating between the priest and the congregation, or a choir representing the congregation ; recitative reading in appointed parts, as in the story of the Passion ; plastic decorations and representations ; solemn processions ; mimic acting, of which the

symbolism had sometimes a very realistic coloring ; all the elements were thus present, and by their combination and mutual interblending a dramatic form must necessarily have been produced. This had taken place in the early Middle Ages, and within the Church itself ; a drama of an operatic character had thus been developed, and was acted, particularly on great commemoration days and high festivals. The performance made part of the Church service ; it was done in Latin ; the recitative dialogue was based on the Biblical text or on the prescribed portions of the Ritual, and the ordinary songs were supplied by the traditional passages of Church prose or hymns. Gradually these liturgical dramas received a higher artistic development ; their contents were enlarged, their representation was made more lively, and poets began to show their cleverness in giving a more perfect form to the libretto. From being an integral portion of the service, this acting became a sort of accessory ornament ; at last it left the service quite behind it, although it still continued to be used in connection with the worship at the celebration of Church feasts and for the edification of the congregation. A greater freedom was then allowed in the choice and arrangement of the material. What had formed at first a part, or merely an episode, might now be elaborated into an independent drama, and actions which had at first been represented disjointedly could thus be brought into their natural connection and run into a whole. An incessant process of separating and uniting, of extending and curtailing, marks the history of the liturgical drama, and indeed of the mediæval drama generally. Even the language of the drama was influenced by this development ; the common language of the people was frequently mixed up with the Church Latin.

The short exposition which we have here given refers mainly to the MYSTERIES which grew out of the celebration of the Christmas and Easter festivities. But the MIRACLE PLAYS, which were acted in honor of the saints, were developed in exactly the same way. The Bible, and the apocryphal writings in connection therewith, supplied the material for the Mysteries ; the legends

furnished the material of the fables which were worked up dramatically for the Miracle Plays, and which emanated in the same manner from the celebration of the ritual. From the nature of the subject, however, a worldly element was mixed up with the Latin Miracle Plays much earlier than with the Mysteries; indeed the Miracles had a more worldly tone from their very beginning, and were generally represented by young clerics and scholars \* on the eve of the festival which was about to be celebrated.

But the different stages of development in the Church drama were not related to each other in such a way that any new advance necessarily superseded the older forms. Older forms of the drama frequently continued along with the new. And the same may be said of the Church drama as a whole when compared with the drama outside the Church, whether ecclesiastical or secular; and although the Church drama may have gradually fallen into the background, it was not suppressed by the other which had grown out of its bosom.

The beginnings of a popular ecclesiastical drama are found as far back as the twelfth century. To that period belongs the Anglo-Norman *Mystery of Adam*, which in an æsthetic sense can well bear comparison with anything done in the same domain during the later Middle Ages, but in respect to form, language, and manner of representation it marks a transition stage, when the drama was only half emancipated from the Church. This emancipation was effected gradually. At first the stage was attached to the church, and had the church in the background: in the *Mystery of Adam* "God" had his exit through the church door. Afterwards, the plays were enacted in the churchyards, then on village greens, in market-places, and in the streets. At first the most important rôles were acted by the clergy; in the course of time the lay element became more and more prominent in the representation. The changes which took place in the character of the drama itself are of the most importance; the song, the recitative, gave way to spoken

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\* Occasionally even by young girls; see Appendix.

discourse ; the Latin ritual yielded to the vulgar tongue, at first in the dramatic dialogue, then also in the epic parts which formed a kind of framework to the dramatic action. But the drama soon freed itself from this framework, although some remains of the old custom (a sort of address, or explanation of the action to the audience) survived till recent times. The chorus songs, for the most part, disappeared ; and thus the lyrical elements of the drama were also greatly curtailed.

This short, typical sketch of the general development of the drama must serve as an introduction to what we have to say about the mediæval stage in England.

We have no record of any spiritual drama in the Anglo-Saxon age. The germs for Church Mysteries must, however, have been present in the Liturgy of early England. But they could scarcely have found a suitable soil for their development. The serious and subjective nature of the people was not favorable to an unprejudiced exercise of the desire for theatrical representations in connection with their worship.

After the Conquest it was different. Indeed, the second half of the eleventh century and the whole of the twelfth formed for the spiritual drama in France the most decisive and fruitful epoch ; and the Normans on this side of the Channel, as well as on the other side, played the most important part in the progress of the French nation in this domain, as in most others. The two oldest French Mysteries extant\*—*Adam*, and a later play on the *Resurrection*—appear to have been both written by Normans and in England ; and we may well assume that the English population heard the Mystery, in its derived popular or semi-popular phraseology, almost at the same time as they heard it in its strictly liturgical forms, or perhaps even sooner.

The first dramatic representation in England, however, of which we have any record, took place in a school. At the beginning of the twelfth century, the school at Dunstable, in connection with the Abbey of St. Albans, was

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\*The *Sponsus*, or the play of the *Wise and Foolish Virgins*, which goes back to the first half of the twelfth century, is a mixture of Latin and French (or rather Poitiers dialect).



presided over by a Norman clerk named Geffrei, who was expressly brought over from the Continent for the purpose of conducting the convent school at St. Albans. Geffrei wrote at Dunstable a *Play of St. Katherine*, which he had acted by his pupils. For their costumes he asked and received the choir clothes from the sacristy of St. Albans. By a remarkable accident the play almost met a tragic end; a fire broke out the night after the representation. Geffrei's dwelling was burnt, with the borrowed costumes. The author saw in this the hand of God, and took holy orders. When Richard, the then abbot of St. Albans, died, Geffrei was made his successor (in 1119); he lived till 1146.

The *Play of St. Katherine* is lost; perhaps even the manuscript was the prey of the flames in that fateful night. We may well assume that it was written in Latin verse—perhaps mixed with snatches of Norman-French.

Geffrei had studied in Paris, and may have there received his introduction to dramatic writing. French scholars very frequently wrote Church dramas. That Hilarius, who on good grounds has been supposed to be an Anglo-Norman, and who was a pupil of Abelard's at Paraclete when Geffrei was abbot of St. Albans, in addition to his two liturgical Mysteries on *Lazarus* and *Daniel*, composed about 1125 a Miracle Play on *St. Nicholas*, which has exactly the character of a school drama.\*

In the second half of the twelfth century Miracle Plays began to be acted in England even publicly before the whole people. The classical passage in the *Life of the Holy Archbishop and Martyr Thomas*, by William Fitzstephen, shows that such representations were common in London between 1170 and 1180 A. D. In a description of the English capital, annexed to his work, the biographer remarks, with a side-glance at Rome: "Instead of theatrical exhibitions, instead of scenic plays, London has plays of a holier kind: viz., representations of the miracles which the holy confessors worked, or of the sufferings in which the constancy of the martyrs was

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\*See Appendix.



gloriously confirmed." It is scarcely to be doubted that these representations took place in the Anglo-Norman tongue.

In these early times, therefore, the English people—at least those outside the Church walls—were made especially familiar with that species of the religious drama, whose fables belonged to the cycle of the legends and pious tales, and therefore to a field which Norman epic poets largely cultivated. Works like *Adam* cannot have been represented very frequently in the twelfth century ; and still less frequently, if at all, were popular dramas acted in which the Saviour himself appeared and spoke, and the story of the Passion was certainly not yet represented in real dramatic form. In a nation where the religious play was something new, and where the religious sentiment was deeply ingrained, if actors had proceeded too freely they would probably have been accused of profanation.\* But the English people became gradually accustomed to the spiritual drama and learned to enjoy it without any qualms of conscience. Legendary subjects prepared the way for Biblical ; scenes from the Old Testament for similar ones from the New ; and so, finally, the most sacred portions of the story of salvation came to be represented openly, and when the original shyness was once overcome, these latter portions must have indeed aroused the keenest interest of the pious spectators. Nothing so much interests the ordinary mind as to see what is already known brought forward in new form, or to see that which is regarded with holy awe brought into touch with ourselves. The same religious sentiment which had held the English people at first aloof from the Biblical drama, afterwards made this subject the most beloved of all, and cast the dramatized legends into the shade. Thus in the course of time the religious drama in England changed its contents, but still retained the name which it bore at its first public appearance. A rigorous ter-

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\*Even in France, where the liturgical drama was indigenous, the popular drama seems at first to have drawn especially from legendary subjects, and only later to have turned decisively to Biblical stories. And if the extant monuments and the authorized reports permit a true deduction, at least the story of the Passion was much later in being dramatized there than in England.

minology, which, indeed, finds no support in the old manner of speech,\* distinguishes the Biblical Mystery from the legendary Miracle Play. In mediæval England the popular religious drama is called "Miracle" without any regard to its contents. Among those Miracle Plays which, according to contemporary evidence, were acted in the second half of the thirteenth century in churchyards, on village greens, and in the streets of the towns, we have probably productions of the Biblical as well as of the legendary sort.

The advance of the religious drama in England is connected with the advancing importance of the fairs, with the growth of the national wealth, the spread of trade and industry, the elevation of the burgesses, and the prosperity of the guilds. All these conditions conduced at the same time to the emancipation of the drama from the Church and the clergy. The clergy as a whole, indeed, were very far from giving up their activity in things theatrical. In the second half of the thirteenth century, and even still in the fourteenth, many clerics appeared masked and painted in the public Miracle Plays—to the great scandal of pious souls who remembered the canonical decrees sternly forbidding such things. Neither the censure of serious judges of morality, nor the renewing and sharpening of the Church statutes by popes and synods, was able completely to suppress this disorder. The greater the influence gained by acting the Biblical dramas among the masses, the less the clergy were inclined to let the means of gaining such influence be wrested entirely out of their hands by the laity. Pecuniary interests were also at stake. In the year 1378 the choir singers of St. Paul's petitioned Richard II. to prevent certain uneducated and inexperienced persons from carrying out their intended representation of the history of the Old Testament; they thus made paramount the interests of the cathedral clergy, who had spent large sums in preparing a public representation of the same subject for the following Christmas. Mendicant friars, Franciscans, Carmelites,

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\* See Appendix.

also turned their attention to the religious popular stage. Open rivalry cannot have always been maintained between the clergy or clerks and the laity ; even in later times we may frequently assume a peaceful co-operation, although we do not know exactly how it was done. It is probable that in many places a clergyman acted as superintendent over the religious plays ; and at least one side of the dramatic art—and in our opinion the most important of all—must have remained through the entire Middle Ages the special province of the clergy, in the widest sense of the word, viz., the composition of the drama. The honest artisan or shopkeeper, who could scarcely learn his allotted part, was hardly able to compose the text of a spiritual play.

In the motley variety of the mediæval world there is nothing more hazardous than an attempt to express the living development of the practice of an art in a short and universal formula. So much, however, we may say, that from the second half of the thirteenth century the lay element, especially as incorporated in the guilds, began to prevail in the representation of the religious dramas. The character of these dramas, however, was determined as much by the kind of players and spectators as by the kind of composer.

This refers particularly to the language used in the dramas. In the reign of Henry III., which marks an advance of the national spirit in so many departments, the first attempts at an English drama were probably made. Its home, it would appear, was in the East Midlands. With more or less energy, but still with effect, the impulse spread thence on every side. To the north—through Yorkshire, and then up to the river Tyne ; to the west, where Chester very early became a centre for the development of dramatic art, and gradually raised itself, as we may assume, to the position of a dramatic metropolis for Preston, Lancaster, Kendal, and, beyond the sea, for Dublin. The impulse also pushed on toward the south, and notably into the heart of the country, where Coventry afterwards acquired a great reputation for its religious plays.

The oldest English drama now extant bears a de-

cidedly East Midland stamp—though a deeper criticism may yet fix its locality more closely—and must have been composed shortly after the middle of the thirteenth century. It treats in independent form an apocryphal subject which belongs to the Easter cycle and appears worked up among the French Mysteries in the Resurrection Play; it is Christ's descent to Hades,\* or *The Harrowing of Hell*. This subject, which has inspired many an English poet, early and late, has more of an epic than a dramatic character. The victorious Saviour, to whom is assigned the hero's part, leaves in reality very little room for the interference of the other actors—the powers of Hell; while the patriarchs and prophets awaiting the Redeemer in Limbo are necessarily doomed to passivity. The old dramatist, besides, has missed a main effect by making these passive characters give vent to their feelings only after Hell has been conquered, when the action only wanted its crowning effort. In the Gospel of Nicodemus, and in the majority of derived descriptions, it is these very characters who begin the action. The light which goes before the Saviour and penetrates into the under-world fills their hearts with hope, and they predict the arrival of Him for whom they wait. But, in throwing away this motive, the poet, indeed, sought and obtained an effect of another kind: His hero opens the drama, which begins before the gates of Hell, and afterwards penetrates into the interior,† and here he advances alone into the dim Unknown in the greatness of his purpose. But the kernel of this drama—very different from the traditional form—is a controversy between Christ and Satan; we might here repeat what we said in speaking of the poem on the *Owl and Nightingale* (vol. i. p. 214), for such controversies were characteristic of that age. Satan defends himself with the statement that what one has bought is his own: “Adam came hungry to me, and as Suzerain I made him do homage; he is mine and all his race for an apple

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\* See *Introduction to Our Early English Literature*, by W. Clarke Robinson, page 63.

† We must here, however, observe that the divisions of the stage were not placed behind, but beside, each other, and open to the spectators.



which I gave him." But the Saviour replies, "Satan, mine was the apple which thou gavest to him ; the apple and the apple-tree were both my creation. How could you, then, dispose of goods which belonged to another ? Since he has, therefore, been bought with my own, he is mine by right." Satan now gives up the point of right, betakes himself to entreaty, and appeals to the reasonableness of it : "Retain heaven and earth for thyself; leave the souls in hell to me. Let me retain what I have ; what you have you may peacefully possess." "Be silent, Satan," speaks the Lord, "for you have cast double-ace !\* Do you think that I have died for naught ? By my death mankind is redeemed. Those who have served me shall dwell with me in heaven. You shall suffer greater pains than anyone in this place." Satan : "None can do worse to me than I have already borne. I have suffered so great evil that it is indifferent to me where my lot fall. If you rob me of mine, I will also rob you of yours. I will go from one man to another and draw away many from you." The Lord : "God knows, I will speak a word with you, and compel you to keep peace ; I will bind you so firmly that you will rob me of few. . . . Only the smaller devils of little power will be permitted, henceforth, to go among men, and to get possession of all those who will not resist them." The victory in the controversy is now followed by successful action. Christ advances on the gates of Hell, the sentinel takes to flight, the gates fall down ; the Lord binds Satan, who must abide in his chains till the last day. And now the Saviour turns to those for whose deliverance he has come ; and they welcome him with reverence and shouts of joy. Adam, Eve, Abraham, David, John the Baptist, Moses, pray in words of deepest fervor, humility, repentance, and anxious hope ; the response of the Redeemer breathes love and peace.

The technics of the drama in the Middle Ages, as shown in this play, are in a very low state of development ; the representation is simple, dignified, very curt, in broad

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\* Double-ace is the lowest throw in dice.



outlines, somewhat angular and stiff ; no overflowing pathos, although deep feeling ; no realism in the miniatures ; no fun, and no vulgarity. Whatever the poet wants to say to his hearers, he says with deep earnestness and does not fail of his effect. We say "his hearers," for hearing was, in this case, more important than seeing ; the centre of gravity of the representation lies entirely in things which become quite clear even without action. And this drama is an example of the species which has not yet quite cast the shell of the epic-liturgical period : a narrative prologue introduces us to the play.

About a generation—but hardly much more—separates this oldest extant English drama from the next. The play of *Jacob and Esau*,\* as we take the liberty of calling it, appears to have been composed not far from the mouth of the Humber, and probably to the north of the dialect line. The influence of the East Midlands is seen in the choice of subject, which was not popular on the earlier stage elsewhere, and the manner of treatment also reminds us of the districts and the century which produced the poems of *Genesis* and *Exodus*.†

In *Jacob and Esau* the dramatic art is still of a low standard ; the situations are not made much use of ; the characteristics show little depth or originality. The poet is full of reverence for his subject, and dramatizes faithfully what seems to him its most important traits, without putting to it much of his own originality. He writes in good verses, in simple, vivid language, but hardly ever exerts his powers of invention, and he also evidently requires no special means of excitement to fascinate and affect an audience not spoiled by such exhibitions. But so much greater are the demands he makes on the imagination of his spectators. We are told nothing in the drama of Jacob's long residence with Laban ; and the poet does not even feel the necessity of filling up the time in which the episode occurs by suggesting any other action, but, by a *salto mortale*, simply skips the whole period. Perhaps Jacob left the

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\*See Appendix.

† See vol. i. of this work, p. 198 (English Version).

stage for some minutes and returned, bringing back with him Rachel, Leah, children, and dependents. As we read the drama now, one and the same monologue of Jacob begins on the journey to Haran and ends on his journey home. The significant period is simply indicated by the words: *Hic egrediatur Jacob de Aran in terram nativitatis suæ*. The poet observes closely the unity of idea, viz., Israel's election. Hence the scenes between God and Jacob are much more important in his eyes than those describing Jacob's relation to Esau; and the reconciliation between the two brothers, which ends the drama, makes this idea perfectly clear; for it at once does justice to the humanitarian and kindly basis on which the sublimest destinies are founded.\*

### III.

*Jacob and Esau* has been preserved pretty much in its original form, partly because the subject, being complete in itself, and without direct reference to the Church feasts, did not induce later poets to undertake a revision or a new treatment. But those plays which formed the centre of the religious dramas experienced all sorts of metamorphoses and variations, in which early forms were often replaced by later alterations. This is specially true of the Christmas and Easter Plays. Both contained the germs for a rich development, which proceeded in two different directions and finally joined together the branches of the mighty trees which had grown originally from the same soil.

In the first place, the *Adoration of Christ by the Shepherds* stood in the closest relation to the *Birth of Christ*—the nucleus of the Christmas Plays; indeed, the former might have directly represented the latter. But to the Shepherds in St. Luke's gospel are added the Three Kings in the gospel of St. Matthew, and in connec-

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\*The last words of the piece are: "*Jacob*: God reward thee, brother, that thou hast so wished to kiss thy servant. *Esau*: No, Jacob, dear brother, I will tell thee something quite different: Thou art my Lord by the decree of fate. Let us go together, thou and I, to my father and to his wife, who loves thee, brother, as her life."

tion with them appear the *Flight to Egypt* and the *Slaughter of the Innocents* at Bethlehem. From St. Luke, again, was taken the Purification of Mary, which indeed caused great chronological difficulties to bring it into the successive chain of events, but such difficulties were not long allowed to prevail. Candlemas was generally placed after the *Slaughter of the Innocents*, and to this was added the Dispute in the Temple, which occurs at the end of the second chapter of Luke. But the Christmas Mysteries extended still further, with a backward reach : The Annunciation and the Visit to Elizabeth naturally occur as prologue ; but the train of religious thought is carried far back, even into the Old Testament. As in the Church year, Christmas Eve is introduced by the day consecrated to Adam and Eve, and as in the Church liturgy, no less than in its homiletics and art, the Old and New Testament are generally placed side by side, giving at the same time cause and effect, promise and fulfillment, type and realization ; so also in the Mysteries this tendency was followed, and the redemption of the world was traced back to its origin and motive, and Christ's ancestors and antitypes were represented side by side with his own personal appearance. The Mysteries, therefore, commenced with the Creation of the World and the Fall of Lucifer, brought in next the Fall of Adam and the Murder of Abel, went on through the Flood to the Sacrifice of Isaac, from Abraham to Moses, and, recapitulating the predictions of the prophets, arrived at the New Testament. In this there was really nothing new. The Christmas cycle of the liturgical Mysteries embraced from the first two great groups. The one, proceeding from the Gospels, and partly also from the Apocrypha, had for its central point the Birth of Christ. The other had for its nucleus the long line of prophets, and its text also was drawn from an old portion of the Christmas service, from a sermon long attributed to St. Augustine, and from which in the course of time several Old Testament dramas were detached and gained a more or less independent existence. An important outgrowth from this group is seen already in the Anglo-Norman Mystery of *Adam*. Thus the

principal point with the English dramatists was the developing of the two parts, each separately, and then joining them together, and here they evidently did not know what to make of the original nucleus of the one part, viz., the predictions of the prophets ; wherever these appear in later English Mysteries they seem like pieces cut out of the liturgy which the living organism of the freer religious drama was unable to assimilate.

The Easter Plays also formed themselves into a richly but more simply developed whole. The whole history of the Passion in all its separate points—the Conspiracy, the Last Supper, the Arresting, the Trial, the Scourging, Crucifixion, and even the Descent into Hell—preceded the Resurrection, and the immediately subsequent manifestation at Emmaus and the conversion of the unbelieving Thomas followed ; the Ascension, probably even in the earlier versions, formed the termination.

The Christmas cycle and the Easter cycle now converged ; a few mediating articles, such as the Baptism of Christ, the Raising of Lazarus, were inserted ; and, by putting the Last Judgment at the end, the whole course of sacred history was thus gone through—no doubt with certain glaring omissions.

The important step of joining those cycles may have taken place in England soon after the beginning of the fourteenth century. Of great influence towards the union was the Corpus Christi Day, which was introduced into the Church in 1264, and attained to undisputed observance by the year 1311. Such a celebration, which brought together under the open sky and in the finest season of the year a whole population, lay and clerical, and which referred to the very core of all their worship and the secrets of their faith, which led past a long procession, pompous and imposing, with its beautifully ornamented altars and stages, and made still more striking by its figurative representations and *tableaux vivants* from sacred history, was above all things specially appropriate for the introducing of a magnificent religious secular play intended as an exposition of the historic basis of their faith from beginning to end. It is therefore perfectly intelligible that the English Mysteries as a whole should have



generally developed into Corpus Christi Plays—and less frequently into Whitsunday Plays.

The corporations—each, as a rule, with its own festival, which it was in the habit of celebrating by dramatic representations—were now face to face with a general festival which had to be celebrated in common. And as all the guilds were represented in the procession of Corpus Christi Day, it soon became a point of honor with each to take part in the great festival, by arranging a portion and getting up, as it were, a little play inside the greater, and having it acted by members of the guild. Where this was not possible because the guild was too unimportant or too poor, or because the number of corporations seeking to participate was greater than the parts to be allotted, several guilds or trades shared in one play. The choice or allotment of the separate dramatic actions may have depended partly on historic tradition, or on some internal relation of a special play to any particular craft; in most cases, however, purely external circumstances—such as regard for the *mise en scène*—seem to have decided them. The play of the *Three Kings* was allotted to the goldsmiths, because of the crowns that had to be made. Carpenters and seamen were almost indispensable for the construction and equipment of *Noah's Ark*. Smiths were valuable—not in Coventry alone—at the play of the *Crucifixion*; in some places the point was decided in favor of the blacksmiths, on account of the dumb rôle of the ass in the *Flight to Egypt*. That which depended originally on free choice, mutual agreement, or even on accident, or which was arranged on the advice of the clergy, came afterwards under the control of the guild office, and formed a precedent and a duty. And then, indeed, it also happened that what was at first considered as an honor and a pleasure became a burden. This or that guild tried to be freed from participation in the play, for the sake of convenience, parsimony, or from want of power and means, and changed their active participation into a mere payment; while another guild sometimes undertook two or more plays.

The circumstances hitherto stated were of the greatest



influence in the development of the religious drama in England. The collective Mystery Plays were of necessity composed, from the very beginning, out of a multitude of small plays, differing in extent and importance, but each in itself independent. Being the work of different poets, and often belonging to different epochs, these plays showed the greatest variety of treatment, tone, style, and metrical form. Sometimes one play has little reference to the one preceding it. Things which the spectator has seen played before his eyes are presented to him again in a long discursive introductory monologue ; and there is no want of inequalities and contradictions in the details. Under the circumstances, a piece originally independent was easily worked up by a dramatist for his own particular cycle, and indeed was sometimes taken over without any change at all. The influence of one district on another, and the taste of the various epochs, could thus easily have their effect in the formation of the individual plays.

The necessity which sometimes arose for a play not yet disposed of frequently occasioned the cutting up of an old one, or even the insertion of some quite new dramatic action, or the dividing and joining of motives ; that is, the demarcation of the plays depended upon the locality, and especially on the epoch. When a guild took up into its own play the play of a neighboring guild, the actions of both were generally run into one, or welded together.

Since the external connection between the getting up of a play and any particular trade had caused in many cases the allotment of the play to that trade, this realistic relation was also necessarily expressed in the manner of representation, and, indeed, often even in the formation of the drama itself. It was not only a question of costume and outfit, but also of the action and speech ; not only whether Noah's ark, when finished and filled with all its animals, produced an illusion, but also whether in constructing the ark Noah showed himself a proper carpenter, whether the crew of the ark during the flood conducted themselves as real sailors or merely as landlubbers. The smiths, or whatever similar craftsmen

performed at the play of the *Crucifixion*, made it a point of honor to affix the Saviour on the cross in a workman-like way ; \* and thus the details of their trade, with all its difficulties and accidents, come to terrible application on such momentous occasions, and give to the accompanying dialogue the crudest, and—in a technical as well as in a physiological sense—the most illusive life. And here the influence of the actors is seen upon the writer, who, to please them, sometimes puts things which are merely incidental in a prominent position, and at great length places the trite and low close beside the noble and unique, joins the comic to the tragic, or spoils the one by the other. And reference to the living performers also influences the writer, consciously or unconsciously, even in the characterization of his chief figures ; for man, indeed, such as he is born and made, presents himself as a unit to the unprejudiced eye. And we may therefore well assert that the realism of the old English drama, in the good and the bad sense, depended almost entirely upon the conditions under which it was acted.

The nature and method of representation, on the other hand, bear evident marks of the origin of these festival plays. The individual piece is connected with the scaffolding that served for its representation, and that gave to it, besides its own name, the additional designation of *Pageant*. In the towns the stage was movable ; the scaffolding of the theatre was wheeled about from street to street, and halted, in due order, before the houses of the magnates, for the production of the play ; in the country, on the other hand, it was the audience that moved, and a long series of immovable scaffolding remained fixed in one place. In the towns, the route of the theatre cars moving through the streets showed the way the Corpus Christi procession had gone ; in the country, the row of stage scaffoldings indicated, either by their fixed position or their order, the altars and stations which the procession had passed, or at which it had

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\* In the *Passion Play*, still acted every tenth year at Oberammergau, all the performers are subjected to a long special training, even in the minutest details.  
—W. C. R.

stopped. But in both cases a portion of the street or green, between the scaffolding and the spectators, was reserved for the stage, though perhaps the actors sometimes found it difficult to keep this space or proscenium clear from the curious and thronging masses.

The stage was spread out in breadth for single pieces, as well as for the whole play—the age had little idea of perspective. Places which were to be considered separated were placed side by side upon the stage—such as a room or house and the street in front. In many cases the chief stage of a play had two or more subordinate stages beside it, and the free space between these left room for movement from one to the other. The spectators could then see the *dramatis personæ* disengaged, and could observe them in all their goings. This was decidedly unfavorable for artistic illusion. The imagination of the spectator had sometimes to give a considerable extension to the space actually before his eyes. Time is measured by the space traversed by the *dramatis personæ*, and the precedent observed in *Jacob and Esau* occurs again and again, though seldom or never to the same extent. Such freedom in the manipulation of space and time is not favorable to the development of a finished form of art ; on the other hand it allows the dramatist to say everything he has a mind to.

But how remarkable is the contrast between this idealistic nature of the stage as a whole, and that timorous realism with which individual subjects are presented,—almost in a plastic form. Even if the costumes and equipment were traditional, typical, symbolical ; even if Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Apostles appeared in dresses the cut and color of which were taken from the plastic art of the age ; even if the pillar was gilt to which the Redeemer was bound during the scourging,—all these were deviations from the historic truth of which an audience in the fourteenth or fifteenth century could not possibly be conscious. On the whole, the impression produced by the stage was somewhat similar to that made by looking at old maps, where towns, mountains, clumps of trees, animals, are painted large and draw our eye, and are out of all reasonable proportion to the

plain country around them and the foreshortened distance.

The ideal and the realistic are placed close beside each other in the stage of the period. But who can fail to perceive that the dramatic poetry of that age, and indeed—with a few brilliant exceptions—mediæval poetry generally, produces a similar impression. Except in poets like Chaucer, or in the best productions of the popular poetry, the idealizing poetry, without which there is no art, and the realistic, without which all art must languish, are never found thoroughly interpenetrated and blended together; they are generally satisfied with a mere *modus vivendi*, and each has assigned to it its special province. This will always be the case where the ideals, hovering in their traditional stiffness before the poet or artist, have no living relation to the reality of the life in which he is placed.

In the course of the fourteenth century the numerous cycles of festival plays began to take possession of the English religious stage. They did not, of course, prevent the representation of individual pieces; on the contrary, the increased interest in acting and playing was even favorable to separate pieces. Frequently, however, the same play was acted as part of a collective drama, and as an independent piece, so that from this rivalry poetry drew little advantage. The great collective plays, however, retained the greater splendor and attraction.

At a later period we hear also of the representation of smaller cycles. At Christmas, the history of the Old Testament was sometimes enacted;\* and at the same or some other feast (*St. Anne's Day, Candelmas*) the real contents of the Christmas cycle were given, and at Easter, or on Corpus Christi Day, the whole subject of *Christ's Passion* and death. And thus it sometimes happened—at least, since the fifteenth century—that the cycle was not played at once (as the great festival plays were), but its separate parts were made to serve for the celebration of the return of some feast-day, so that the

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\* See above, p. 240.



interval between the acts sometimes lasted a whole year. But it is very important, and can be proved, at least in one case,\* that an exchange of text-books took place between the smaller and larger cycles.

#### IV.

The religious drama, and the whole Mystery cycle, spread over all England and beyond it—as Dublin testifies. But the soil and atmosphere of every place was not equally propitious to the development of this art. If we are not completely deceived, the drama thrived much better in the northeast than in the southwest of England; better in the districts originally settled by the Angles than in districts settled by the Saxons; better in those parts where the homilies on the Scriptures and the Biblical poetry of a high cast were native from early times, than where the saintly legends attained their highest cultivation and cyclic development. We shall make this general statement of our views more plain by the following exposition.

We have very scanty information about the fate of the English drama in its first narrow home. Some towns in the East Midlands, especially in the East-Anglian districts, preserve the recollection of theatrical representations of religious plays; we know in particular that at Wymondham, near Norwich, such plays were usually acted every year. From Norwich itself we have still extant a *Play of the Grocers*—on the Creation of Eve and the Fall—in two MSS. of the sixteenth century (1534 and 1565). Only a single remnant of the East-Midland dramaturgy in the heyday of the Mysteries is preserved—it is an independent play which may have been acted either by itself or as part of a cycle. It is the play of *Abraham and Isaac*, such as it has been preserved in the Brome manuscript, written in Suffolk and not far from the Norfolk boundary. In its present form this drama belongs to the fifteenth century, but it can be shown that there was an older copy, belonging evidently

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\* See *Ludus Coventriæ*, ed. J. O. Halliwell, p. 290.



to the fourteenth century, and which seems to have been retained in all its essential qualities in the present text. Compared with the *Harrowing of Hell*, and even with *Jacob and Esau*, *Abraham and Isaac* shows a decided progress. The poet moves more freely, has some idea of psychological depth, of painting situations, and, according to his ability, he makes the most of his pathetic subject—which is one of the few themes of a dramatic and even tragic nature treated at that period. He gives us at least a glance at the relation between father and son just before the father receives the terrible command to sacrifice his only child. Abraham receives the command itself with too much coolness and resignation—a traditional error, which arises from reverence for the subject. Abraham speaks like a moral preacher, not like a father. But when he begins to make his preparations for the execution of the horrid deed, his suppressed feelings begin to assert themselves, and the internal conflict grows more violent as the development proceeds, although—considering the nature of the hero and the views of the poet—the solution cannot appear doubtful for a single moment. The childlike innocence of Isaac is beautifully set forth, and in a way that must have touched the father's heart, and which still greatly moves the spectator and even the reader. When they arrive at the fatal spot the boy speaks kindly and cheerfully to his father; but Abraham's dejected look rouses his astonishment, and when he sees no animal for sacrifice, a foreboding of the terrible design first strikes him. Abraham seeks in vain to quiet him by a reference to God, who will provide an animal for sacrifice.

But *Isaac* replies :

Yes, father, but my heart begins to quake to see that sharp sword in your hand. Why do you bear the sword drawn so? I wonder greatly at your looks.

*Abraham*.—Oh ! Father of heaven, I am so full of woe, this child here breaks my heart in two.

*Isaac*.—Tell me, dear father, first of all, have you drawn the sword for me?

*Abraham*.—Oh, Isaac, my sweet son, peace, peace, for indeed you break my heart.

*Isaac*.—Indeed, father, you must have something in your mind, that grieves you ever more and more.

*Abraham.*—Oh ! God of heaven, send me thy grace, for my heart was never half so sore.

*Isaac.*—I pray you, father, let me know whether I am to suffer any harm or no.

*Abraham.*—Believe me, sweet son, I may not tell thee yet, my heart is now so full of woe.

*Isaac.*—I pray you, dear father, hide it not from me, but tell me something of what you have in mind.

*Abraham.*—Oh, Isaac, Isaac, I must kill thee !

*Isaac.*—Kill me ! father, alas ! what have I done ? If I have in aught trespassed against you, you may make me full mild with a rod ; but with your sharp sword kill me not, for I am only but a child, father.

*Abraham.*—I am full sorry, my son, to shed thy blood, but truly, my child, I have no choice.

*Isaac.*—Now I would to God my mother were here on this hill ; she would kneel for me on both her knees to save my life. And since my mother is not here, I pray you, father, change your looks, and kill me not with your sharp knife.

Abraham now tells him God's command. As soon as Isaac understands the idea, that the will of God requires the sacrifice, he yields to his fate. He prays no more for his life, he murmurs not at his destiny ; but, in this meek resignation, his ingenuous prattle is now quite overpowering. He first wishes his father to conceal his death from his mother, and then again requests him to convey to her his last farewell. He is afraid of the sword, and prays Abraham to put a cloth over his eyes, that he may not see it. On the other hand he is unwilling to await the stroke with his hands bound. He prays for his father's blessing and asks forgiveness for everything in which he may have offended him. Every word cuts Abraham's heart to the quick, and lets loose in him a new tempest of emotions. And thus there are delaying motives which always keep coming up again and again, and always fresh means for lengthening out, with a touching fascination, the terrible scene on which the interest of this drama depends. None of the other Middle-English dramas on this subject has given to this scene such a richness of motives and variations.\* At first it is Isaac who appears to stay the progress of the action, then again Abraham, whom his son beseeches more than

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\* Here we may observe that some passages of this drama arouse the suspicion that motives from other plays may have been interwoven with the representation forming the nucleus of this play.

once to make an end. There is, indeed, action and reaction throughout between the participators; the crisis is thus prolonged and the spectators are held in breathless suspense.

The happy issue is related quite as finely as the painful crisis. The angel has departed that brought Abraham the joyful message. The patriarch praises God for his grace, and orders his son to arise. But Isaac is still expecting the fatal stroke. When he understands from his father that God has granted him his life, the joy of his heart breaks forth; but doubt and fear have not yet quite left him; in the conflict of his feelings he requires repeated assurances that the danger is over. And how naïve and touching are the words he addresses to the ram which is to die in his stead:

“Oh! sheep, sheep! Blessed mayst thou be, that ever thou wert sent down hither.”

or the words he speaks when stirring the fire:

“But father, when I stoop down low! you will not kill me with your sword, I trow.”

“No fears, sweet son, have no dread, my mourning is past.”

“Yes! but I would that sword were in a sheath, for certainly, father, it makes me full agast.”

We shall give no more quotations here. The poet has thoroughly seized the contrast between the tremendous tragicness of the situation and the naïve charm of the tender childlike sentiments, and has presented it lovingly and with the finest perception. But his style and metre are very far from the height of his ambition—at least in the form in which his work has been preserved.

The religious drama was developed with great vigor and individuality in Northumbria—especially in Yorkshire. Towns like York, Leeds, Beverley, here formed centres for the art of the cyclic plays, which were represented yearly.

The country fair, held once a year at Woodkirk, in the neighborhood of Wakefield, may have been still more important than these towns. According to a happy hypothesis, Woodkirk fair was the place where the guilds of Wakefield and other neighboring districts enacted those

Corpus Christi Plays which have become so famous under the name of the TOWNELEY MYSTERIES. The manuscript, which is said to have formerly belonged to Woodkirk Abbey, and was afterwards for a long time in possession of the Towneley family, whose name it bears, dates from the beginning of the fifteenth century; it contains thirty or thirty-one Plays,\* and its cycle is the result of the development of the whole fourteenth century. The original roughnesses and diversities of this MS. have been less dressed and smoothed than in other similar collections. The general impression it produces is as if made up of a number of instantaneous pictures, which confirm the different phases of its consecutive historic growth. We have in *Jacob and Esau* a pre-cyclic drama almost in its unaltered form; but the Play of the *Descent to Hell*,† which gives to the subject a new treatment and comes nearer to the Latin source, shows us the impulses which were given to the East Midland model worked out in an entirely independent way. The progress in the TOWNELEY MYSTERIES from the simplest to the most complicated dramatic form can be observed quite as plainly as the progress from the simple rhyming couplet to the more or less artificial forms of strophic verse, and to the blending of different systems of verse in one and the same piece. In many plays‡ we can easily detect passages that have been intercalated. The central drama, which has for its subjects the Conspiracy of the Jews, the Lord's Supper, and the Seizure of Christ, is a good example of the blending into one of two plays originally independent; and *vice versa* the play of *St. Thomas* is recognizable as an independent, new formation of an action which appeared at first merely as an episode.

The dramatic art of other districts doubtless influenced the Northumbrian drama, such as it was produced at Woodkirk.§ As far as we can trace such influence in the TOWNELEY MYSTERIES, it points especially to the East Midlands. The counties to the west of the Peak in Derbyshire received more from Northumbria

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\* See Appendix.

† *Extractio Animarum.*

‡ *E. g.*, in the *Processus Prophetarum* and in the *Flagellatio.*

§ We shall afterwards speak of the influence of York on Woodkirk.



in the domain of the drama than they could give to it. Their alliterative rhythms\* indeed penetrated also into the Northumbrian drama, but more into the Plays cultivated at York than into those at Woodkirk. The small portions of the Towneley Plays in alliterative form are, in part, evidently interpolations.

On the whole, the drama of the North utilized in its own way all outside influences, and assimilated them. The Corpus Christi Plays of Woodkirk, with few exceptions, bear a decidedly Yorkshire stamp; many of them remind us still more of the motley crowds, mostly of rustics, who attended that fair.

They contain a peculiar mixture of roughness and gentleness, rudeness and tenderness. The treatment of the favorite theme of Abraham's sacrifice is highly characteristic, when we compare it with the Brome drama. The Yorkshire Isaac is by no means such a virtuous hero as the East-Anglian—he never for a moment thinks of declaring himself ready to die; on the contrary, he fights boldly to the last for his young life, though only in childish words. Abraham, indeed, did not tell him that it was a question of God's command. For what use would it have been? The patriarch violently suppresses his feelings, and, having once determined to do the unavoidable, he seeks to have it over as soon as possible. He goes so far as to deceive Isaac when ascending the mountain: "We shall rejoice and be glad when this affair is finished." When on the top of the mountain, Isaac asks unsuspectingly the well-known question, and Abraham answers, "Now, son, I cannot longer deceive you; you were always obedient to me—always did as I wished, yet, in sooth, you must die, if my wish is to be fulfilled." The conflict between father and son, and the conflict in the father's heart, now begin. There is nothing of the fine speeches, of the elegant coquetry of heart, which runs out to such a length in the East-Anglian piece. The dialogue advances with short answers and replies; only the most necessary

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\* We do not speak here of alliteration as an ornament of any particular form of verse, but of the special so-called alliterative long line, whether with or without final rhymes.



words are spoken ; Abraham's feelings are powerfully expressed in a few ejaculations. The simpler the diction, the more we are moved.

- Abraham.* Isaac !  
*Isaac.* Sir ?  
*Abraham.* Come hither, I say.  
 Thou shalt die whatsoever betide.  
*Isaac.* Oh, father, mercy ! mercy !  
*Abraham.* What I say may not be denied ;  
 Take this deed therefore meekly.  
*Isaac.* Oh, good sir, hold off.  
 Father !  
*Abraham.* What, son ?  
*Isaac.* To do your will I am ready,  
 Wheresoever ye go or ride,  
 When I may in any way understand your will ;  
 If I have trespassed I will be better.  
*Abraham.* Isaac !  
*Isaac.* What, Sir ?  
*Abraham.* Good son, be still.  
*Isaac.* Father !  
*Abraham.* What, son ?  
*Isaac.* Think on this yet ;  
 What have I done ?  
*Abraham.* Truly, nothing ill.  
*Isaac.* And shall I be slain ?  
*Abraham.* So have I sworn.  
*Isaac.* Sir, what may help ?  
*Abraham.* Certes, no pleading.  
*Isaac.* I ask for mercy.  
*Abraham.* That may not be.  
*Isaac.* When I am dead, and closed in clay,  
 Who shall then be your son ?  
*Abraham.* Oh, Lord, that I should see this day !  
*Isaac.* Sir, who shall take my place ?  
*Abraham.* Speak no such words, son, I thee pray.  
*Isaac.* Will you slay me ?  
*Abraham.* I trow I must ;  
 Lie still, I might.  
*Isaac.* Sir, let me speak.  
*Abraham.* Now, my dear child, thou mayst not escape.  
*Isaac.* The shining of your bright blade—  
 It makes me quake for fear to die.  
*Abraham.* Therefore on thy face thou shalt be laid—  
 Then when I strike thou shalt not see.  
*Isaac.* What have I done, father ? what have I said ?  
*Abraham.* Truly, nothing evil to me.  
*Isaac.* And thus guiltless shall I be slain ?  
*Abraham.* Now, good son, let such words be.

*Isaac.* I love you always.

*Abraham.* So do I thee.

*Isaac.* Father !

*Abraham.* What, son ?

*Isaac.* Let it now be seen,

For my mother's love.

*Abraham.* Let be, let be !

It will not help thee to complain ;

But lie still till I come to thee,

I miss some little thing, I guess.

It is here that we are first allowed a glance into the father's heart. He says :

He speaks so ruefully to me  
That water comes into mine eye,  
I would lever than all worldly gain  
That I had found him once unkind;  
But no default I found in him.  
I would die for him or pine ;  
To slay him thus I think great sin,  
Such rueful words I with him find ;  
I am full woe that we should part,  
For he will never leave my mind.  
What shall I to his mother say ?  
For where he is soon will she spy.  
If I tell her he ran away,  
Her answer's ready, " That's not right,"  
And I'm afraid her to affright.  
I know not what to her to say.  
He lies quite still yet where he lay,  
Nor moves till I come him to slay.

The simple realism that can so happily balance the conflicting elements in Abraham's breast is elsewhere most attractively expressed in the gentle and benevolent impulses. *Mary's visit to Elizabeth* takes us into the humble interior of an honorable burgess's household, where love and the fear of God shed their beautifying light. "How are you, mother, how do you feel to-day?" "Well, daughter, well, darling; as well as it may be at my age." "To speak with thee methought full long, for thou art with child in thy old age, and thou art called barren." "It will do me good for a long time to come, that I may speak my fill with you, my dear niece; to wit, how thy friends fare in the country where they are; thou canst tell me about them, and how thou art

thyself, darling." "Well, dame; gramercy, for thy inquiries! I know thou meanest well." "And Joachim, thy father, and Anna, my cousin and thy mother—how stands it with him and with her?" "Dame, they are both still alive, both Joachim and Anna, his wife." "I would be sorry, indeed, were it otherwise." "May Almighty God repay thee, dame, for what thou sayest, and bless thee for it." "Blessed be thou among all women, and the fruit that I know is in thy womb. And I shall bless this hour when the mother of my Lord has so come to visit me. . . ." Equally simple is the picture of certain situations of delicacy.

The care of the good-natured Joseph is described with great truth and moderation, when he discovers the condition of his spouse. The involuntary comicalness interblended with the story did not distract an audience, which found a special charm in the close connection of the holy and the secular.

For this art works especially by contrasts; and the Yorkshire drama is distinguished above the others by its power of working up sharp contrasts. The play of the *Crucifixion* may be taken as a type of these glaring contrasts. On the one side we see the rough tradesman-like behavior of the executioners presented with great pains and as dramatically as possible; and on the other side we see the keen sorrow and the deepest pathos in the lamentations of Mary developed with the greatest effect.

A popular humor and a coarse comic vein naturally belong to the sort of people who produced the Towneley Mysteries. The characters and situations in which these qualities are generally seen are indeed typical in the old drama. Pharaoh, Cæsar Augustus, Herod, Pilate are horrid tyrants, inhuman madmen, braggadocios, and bullies; Noah is an honest, God-fearing fellow, who has great difficulty in managing his stubborn wife; Cain is a coarse, selfish peasant; and so all the other types after their kind. The means by which the risibility of the public is to be excited are generally of the same coarse nature—rude, obscene jokes, curses, abuse, scolding, and cudgeling. But by these means the Woodkirk

dramatists make not only a very rich effect, but often a much more striking application than their colleagues in the south and west. They lay on the color more strongly, risk bolder and more striking combinations; frequently they give more powerful motives, and above all they actually sometimes make real, life-like figures.

A perfectly successful, though highly disagreeable figure, is the "Cain" of the Towneley Mysteries. He is a Yorkshire peasant, malicious and niggardly, higgling with God about every sheaf in the sacrifice, and animated with the desire of cheating God, if possible. He has, besides, a surly, easily irritated disposition and a terrible rudeness; he is a master at reviling, cursing, ribaldry, and likes to show his cleverness on the smallest excuse, and even, sometimes, without any excuse at all. A grim, sarcastic humor lends to these qualities the proper relish. It is something really delicious to see how in his whims he spares God just as little as he does the righteous Abel. The development of this character, whose comic side has irresistibly attracted poets and spectators alike, has prevented the terrible tragicness of the action from fully attaining its proper due.

The domestic scenes between Noah and his quarrelsome spouse are very forcibly set forth in the Woodkirk play on *The Deluge*. The obstinacy of Mrs. Noah borders on the incredible—neither threats nor persuasions, nor the sight even of the approaching flood, can induce her to enter the ark. She sits on a hill spinning, and will not move from the spot till she coolly spins out her task. Not till the water is lapping at her feet will she go on board. Noah, however, is not represented as so patient here as in other places. He gives his better half what she deserves—a sound thrashing; she does not ask for his pardon, but defends herself as well as she can, and so we have a free fight, in which Noah is knocked down by his wife, and calls out, "Wife, let us cease; my back is almost broken." "And I am beaten black and blue," says she, "so that I know not what to do." Their sons interfere, and put an end to the unedifying scene.

Downright wickedness and mad rage characterize the

conduct of Caiaphas in the play on the *Smiting on the Face*.\* The torrent of abuse and curses which he pours forth against the Saviour is simply boundless, and it is with the greatest difficulty that Annas restrains him from continuing in his mad fit, and from falling with his own hands upon the defenseless sufferer.

A Woodkirk dramatist has introduced into a play on the *Last Judgment*† some really original scenes about the devils. These scenes satirize all ranks in the most grotesque and vivid manner, and produce a much greater effect than the most eloquent preacher could have done with the same subject. This is especially true of the passage spoken by the young infernal humorist, Tutivil-lus, the cleverest of all the devils.

The rustic Yorkshire humor is shown in its brightest side in the play of the *Shepherds*. This part of the Christmas Mysteries had previously received considerable attention in the French drama, the effect of which upon the English was probably greater than would appear from the text that has been preserved. But just here the powers of assimilation, and, at the same time, the creative talent of the English poets, are most clearly seen. And in this respect the Towneley collection again bears the palm.

It contains two different Shepherd Plays for selection—two variations of the same type, in the same metre and same style, but of very different character. The traits in which they agree internally are drawn from the Bible or from the commonly received traditions of the drama. From the latter source we have the *Three Shepherds*, which seems an imitation of the *Three Kings* from the East; also the fact that the Shepherds afterwards try to sing by themselves the song at first sung by the angels; the way in which they worship the divine child, where they speak one after another, and where each, with his fervent, tender prayer, offers at the same time an equally simple present. A few passages, indeed, betray a closer connection between the two Woodkirk plays. The words

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\* *Coliphizacio* (sic!)

† The thoroughly earnest character at the basis of this play is identical with the corresponding portion of the York Mysteries.



with which Mary thanks the Shepherds are almost identical in both. Certain personal names occur in both (pp. 86-113); but the chief characteristic is the way in which the Shepherds are introduced at the beginning of the play. They enter one after another, each with a monologue,\* either about the universal destiny of man, the sad state or morals of the times, or about their own personal distresses.

But the secular action, which is joined to, or, rather, precedes the Biblical, is entirely different in the two pieces, even though it is developed in each with a great natural charm and with a strong local coloring. In the first piece the secular action does not deserve the name of a dramatic plot; it is occupied only with the mentioning of circumstances and events which might occur every day. The two first Shepherds fall into a quarrel about the emperor's beard. The third, on arriving, good-humoredly establishes peace between them. He reminds them of the girl with the milk pail, and proves to them *ad oculos* their want of wit by making them look into an empty meal-bag. The appearance of the young Shepherd, who tells of the good condition of the cattle feeding up to their knees in grass, causes a diversion. They sit down to a rustic meal, for which each produces his quota, and which turns out liberal enough. The beer-jug passes round and inspires them to sing. At the end they put the remains of the banquet in a basket for the poor, and go to sleep; and the third Shepherd does not forget to cross himself against the influence of elves. The voice of the angel soon wakes the three sleepers from their rest.

The second play contains a real drama, and is indeed a merry farce. The comedy, which is here inserted into the Biblical play, seems completely detached and to be there only for its own sake. The sheep-stealer Mak, who shows a certain relationship to Shakspeare's Autolycus, associates with the Shepherds and robs them, while sleeping on the plain, of a fat ram, which he quickly carries home to his wife and then returns to lie down

\* The third Shepherd of the first play is the only exception, in so far as he enters directly into the dialogue of the two others.

with the other sleepers. When the sheep is missed on the following morning, and the owners knock at Mak's door in the hope of finding the lost ram in his house, they meet with a strange reception. Mrs. Mak, they are told, has been delivered of a child, her fine young boy is in the cradle, and they must therefore keep very quiet. They insist, however, on searching the house and yard, and have therefore to listen to much abuse from the improvised mother. The search is in vain. At length the cradle attracts their attention; they wish to see the child. "Let it alone," says Mak; "it's sleeping; if you awake it, it will cry. I pray you, go away." One of the Shepherds then goes to kiss the child. "What the devil is this?" he says; "it has a long snout!" But even after they have seen the horns of the ram and a known mark on its ear, Mak and his spouse still protest their innocence. "It was bewitched by an elf," says the mother. "I saw it with my own eyes. As the clock struck twelve it was thus misshapen." The Shepherds determine at first to bring the thievish pair before the judge, but finally decide to pardon them. Exhausted with the exertions of their search, they go to sleep, and now Christmas begins.

The whole of this Interlude is filled with the gayest realism and the most excellent humor. "Thus the olden times were wont to joke," and to mix their jokes with the deepest earnest.

If we now go from Woodkirk to York, the contrast between town and country becomes very striking. We see the same kind of people with the same original ethical and æsthetic tendencies, but these appear somewhat refined; certain rustic excrescences, too gnarled and knotty, are laid aside, and, indeed, also much that makes the Towneley Mysteries especially attractive.

Now that the text of the religious drama at York has at length been printed and can be read in plain type, we know more about its history than we do about the history of the religious drama in any other English town. The great prosperity of the guilds in the northern metropolis—from about the year 1330—had for consequence a rich and many-sided development of the Corpus Christi

Plays. The desire of the public for plays was met by the zeal of the several corporations, and the city authorities (who here, as elsewhere, were elected from the guilds) began early to exercise a strict control over the representations of those plays. The earliest extant record on this subject belongs, indeed, only to the year 1378; but it presupposes a similar state of things firmly established by the traditions of long years, and which—though with a few changes—was maintained in its main points up to the time of Queen Elizabeth.

In 1397 Richard II. was present at the Corpus Christi Festival in York. That was the time when the festival performances were at their height. At that period there were disputes, also, about the stations where the pieces should be acted. From early times their number was limited. They began at the entrance of the Priory of Holy Trinity, in the "Mikelgate," and finished on the place known as the "Pavement," situated in the middle of the town, after having played, in all, at twelve stations. But in the last years of the fourteenth century this order was frequently deviated from, and the performance was also given at other places, by which the completeness or dignity of the representation seems to have suffered. Hence arose repeated difficulties with the parish, and adverse regulations by the authorities, until, in the year 1417, the new party gained the victory; and the privilege of being able to see the plays from one's own house became a question of paying instead of a right of usage.

We may understand the conflict if we figure to ourselves the great extent of the collective Mysteries exhibited at York, and the circumstance that the entire performance was completed in one day—the festival day itself. To accomplish this, the players had to be ready, from the early morning, at half-past four. But as the great procession (for the preparation of which a special corporation, the Corpus Christi Guild, was formed in 1408) took place on the same day, the attendance at church must have been, no doubt, diminished by this profusion of spectacular pomp. This induced the Franciscan, William Melton, to discuss the subject in a series of sermons in 1426. He recommended to the congrega-

tion the Corpus Christi Play as an institution good and laudable in itself; but, in order to permit attendance at church on the day of festival, he proposed that the spectacle and the procession should be held on different days. This was done; and in future the Procession took place on the day after the Corpus Christi Festival.

In the year 1415, the town clerk, Roger Burton, drew up an official list of the several pageants of the Corpus Christi Plays in their consecutive order, and with an account of the trades which had to arrange for their performance. And here, among the secular guilds, we see a religious corporation—that of St. Leonhard's Hospital\*—engaged in the festival play. A few years later—doubtless at the command and cost of the city authorities—a complete copy of the texts of the plays was prepared, at least so far as it was possible to get hold of the play-books of the different guilds for this purpose. In some places gaps were, in the meantime, left open, and afterwards partly filled in. Thus, a hand of the sixteenth century (about 1558) inserted, from an old play-book, the play of the Fullers ("God puts Adam and Eve in Paradise"), and made an addition to the play of the Glovers (*Sacrificium Cayme and Abell.*) The same hand inserted the *Purification of the Virgin* at the wrong place (right in the middle of the Resurrection Plays), and, as it appears, according to a later tradition. Unfortunately, the gaps left open for the plays of the Vintners and Ironmongers are not filled up. Their titles were, *The Marriage at Cana*, and *Jesus in the house of Simon the Leper*. The play referring to the Burial of the Virgin,† which was performed by the Linen-weavers, was quite overlooked, even in the design of the Codex.

Burton's list of the year 1415 embraces no less than fifty-one plays; the Codex, the origin of which we have sketched and which is now in the possession of Lord

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\* This performed the *Purification of the Virgin Mary*. Afterwards, in 1477, this play was allotted to the Masons, whilst the other workers and day laborers (wood-carriers, gardeners, field laborers, plasterers, ditchers, are named) had to bear a part of the cost of equipment. The Hatters were only drawn into the play at a later period.

† Known in the York records under the title "*Fergus*." This name was borne in the lost play by a Jew (called differently in other plays) who makes an attack on the bier of the Virgin Mary, and whose arm is, in consequence, withered.



Ashburnham, contains forty-eight plays. Such a large number (at certain periods it seems to have been still greater) speaks for the fruitful development of the guilds at York, and for the keen interest in shows among its citizens. This great number was reached mainly by the division of the dramatic actions, then also by the insertion of new material. The representation of the *Creation and the Fall* is divided into six plays, all, indeed, very simple and short. The history of the *Passion* up to and including the *Death of Christ* spreads, with the accompanying episodes, over eleven plays of a fairly developed character. The drama of the *Deluge* is divided into two plays, the first of which forms the *Building of the Ark* and was allotted to the Ship-carpenters, whilst the second, the *Deluge* itself, was enacted by fishermen and sailors. In the same way the play of the *Three Kings* was split up into two, and in this case we can almost see the operation taking place. Not long after the year 1415, the scene which depicts the three Kings in conversation with Herod was cut out of the original play which belonged to the Goldsmiths, was provided with a new introduction, and as a special Pageant was allotted to the Masons.\* Among the dramatic actions not belonging to the original stock of the collective Mysteries, the York Corpus Christi Plays contained the *Marriage in Cana* (lost), the *Transfiguration*, and especially, towards the end, the four connected pageants—the *Death of Mary*, the *Fergus*† (lost), *Thomas's Vision of Mary's Ascension*, and finally the *Ascension and Coronation of the Virgin*—in close conjunction. While the traditions referring to the "Passing" of the Mother of God have received such a rich dramatic cultivation at York, the legends of Mary's birth and childhood have no part among them, except in a few ordinary and almost unavoidable traits which are only incidentally mentioned.

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\* We need not be astonished here that the Codex gives the scene not only in the play of the Masons, but also repeats it in that of the Goldsmiths. The writer may have had before him a copy of the latter play in which this scene was not scored out. And we may here incidentally remark that the play of the Masons was given over to the newly formed corporation of the Minstrels in the year 1561; the Masons had in the mean time undertaken the play of the *Purification of the Virgin*. See above, p. 267, note.

† See above, p. 267, note.



In contrast to the already mentioned enlargements, we find few cases of curtailment or contraction in the York Mysteries. The *Annunciation*, one of the oldest portions of the whole collection, with the *Visit to Elizabeth*, forms one drama; and probably soon after 1415 there was prefixed to it a prologue, where the prophecies referring to Christ are placed one after another apparently without allowing the prophets themselves to appear. The episode of *The Adulteress* and the *Raising of Lazarus* are represented in Burton's list by two different plays, but in the Ashburnham manuscript by a single play, of like metre and style throughout. The most interesting case of tampering is found in the thirty-third drama of the Codex, which embraces the plays on the *Scourging* and *Condemnation of Christ*, and probably contains fragments of other pageants.\*

The Corpus Christi Plays of York show great harmony with those of Woodkirk. Five pieces—the *Departure of the Israelites*, *Christ in the Temple*, the *Descent to Hell*, the *Resurrection*, the *Last Judgment*—are quite, or almost, identical in the two collections, and wherever any deviations occur the York collection generally contains the earlier form. That the home of these plays is to be sought in the chief town of the county is but a small assumption, against which nothing of importance can be urged. The additions of the Woodkirk dramatists are very interesting. We have previously referred to the scenes with the devil in the *Last Judgment*. A piece of swaggering gush from Pilate has been put in at the beginning of the play on the *Resurrection*. Both additions point to the fact that in the country Mysteries there was more freedom and play-room allowed for humor and coarse comedy than in the town, where the class distinctions of the burgesses and the influence of the church dignitaries held such tendencies within certain limits.

The same remark may be made of country and city plays generally. There is a close affinity in the design and treatment of a large number of the York and Woodkirk plays, and even verbal resemblances sometimes oc-

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\* See Appendix.

cur. The York Mysteries, as a whole, give evidence of that manly character, that strong realism, that mixture of roughness and tenderness, that coarse-grained humor, which we have seen in the Towneley Plays as the typical expression of the North English people. But in the York drama we find nothing which would remind us of the Shepherd Plays of Woodkirk, nothing of that complete emancipation of the comic vein, and also nothing which could be placed beside the Woodkirk *Cain* for recklessness and rudeness. In the play of the *Deluge*, Noah's wife is obstinate and quarrelsome, as may be expected of her, but there appears at least some motive for her conduct, and the composure and patience of the patriarch are guaranties that the conjugal quarrel will be maintained within definite bounds. The York *Pilate* is conceived, to some extent, as human and not so much caricatured, and even the *Herod* of the history of the *Passion* shows some touches of justice.

At the trial of *Christ before the High Priest*, Annas and Caiaphas have, as it were, changed parts; yet the York Annas is very far from being raised to that fiendish ingenuity of spiteful wickedness which astonished us in the Woodkirk *Caiaphas*. The Mystery of the Archiepiscopal city shows a certain moderation, and tries to stick to its subject. But it is by no means insipid; it is full of life, full of dramatic action, and excellently suited to satisfy the outer as well as the inner sense of a great population fond of spectacles and eager for all kinds of excitement. What a terrible commotion prevails in the play of *Christ's Descent to Hell*, and this has even passed over into the Towneley collection. How vividly dramatic is *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem!*—a subject which must have especially attracted the inhabitants of a large town. The history of the *Passion* has in particular received a rich and vigorous finish; many figures and episodes are interwoven with the main action, of which the tremendous pathos is effectively heightened by humorous and coarse realistic accessories.

The tragic subject of *Abraham's Sacrifice* does not attain the same height of effect in the York exposition as in the Woodkirk, or in the old East-Anglian drama.

There is neither the tender, touching play of the feelings which is expressed in the latter, nor the overwhelming truth and simple laconism of the former. Isaac is rather uninteresting—quite as resigned as in the Brome play, and, besides, much drier. Indeed, he is not a child at all, but a man; he is thirty years of age and over.\* Nevertheless in the decisive moment he utters—long before Schiller's Marquis Posa—the heart-piercing words: "Oh, dear father, life is so, so full, so, so sweet."† Abraham is much more ideally conceived than in the Woodkirk play, but scarcely so truly felt. The prayer, however, which he offers after his arrival at the place of sacrifice is very good. And the touch is especially fine, where, at one stroke, we see the contrast already mentioned to the Towneley drama. On the way to the mountain top the unhappy father tries to prepare his son: "Son, if our Master, the Almighty God, wished to have me myself for a sacrifice, I would gladly die; for our whole salvation lies in his hand." "Indeed, father," says Isaac, "so would I also, rather than live long in the world;" and Abraham: "Alas, my son, you have well spoken; God grant you grace to be ready."‡

Examples of excellent characterization are not rare in the York collection. Among others the character of Joseph in contrast to Mary is well kept up, although there is sometimes a difference of conception observable in the different plays, as may be easily imagined. In the play of *Jesus in the Temple*,§ the shyness of Joseph, an uneducated peasant, in appearing before learned people, and the desire to let his more highly educated wife speak instead of himself, is taken from real life, as is, also, in a previous passage, the comparative placidity of the foster-father in contrast to the anxiety of the mother about their lost son. This latter contrast appears heightened and also differently conceived in the *Flight to Egypt*. Here Mary is the all-loving, anxious mother,

\* York Plays, p. 58, l. 82.

† See elsewhere, p. 65, l. 279. Unfortunately Isaac spoils the impression he has made when, after his deliverance from death (l. 325 f.), he repeats: "I would gladly have suffered death, Lord, according to thy will."

‡ See elsewhere, p. 60, l. 137 ff.

§ We may here repeat that this play is found, identical in substance, in the Towneley Mysteries.

the weak woman, almost losing her senses in her care for what is dearest to her ; Joseph on the other hand is the active, faithful, helpful husband. In the charming play of *Christ's Birth* this relation is quite changed. It is here the good-natured Joseph who is careful and anxious about the storm and the rain, the cold and the darkness ; while the holy Virgin, full of trust in God, and happy in the grace accorded her, has heart and mind fixed only on the great and wondrous miracle which she bears within her. Joseph leaves her alone in the stable to go for fire and light. Mary commends herself to the divine protection, and then gives herself up to her joyful hope, until painlessly her child is born. She worships it, and with a timorous devotion takes it in her arms. All this is presented with the tenderest and most touching grace, and what follows is kept at the same high pitch. On his return home, we hear Joseph, weak from age, complaining of the bitter cold. Suddenly a bright light shines upon him, which fills him with astonishment. On entering the stable, he perceives the dear child upon its mother's breast, and vyingly they both now praise and worship it. The divine child is laid in a manger ; the silent worship of the animals that try carefully to warm the tender being completes the delightful picture.

Like the Woodkirk cycle, that of York also affords a great variety of forms of style and rhythm ; but we do not meet with such old forms in the latter as in the former ; the York cycle has also fewer cases indicating tampering, or interpolation by a mixture of different metres in the same play. A remarkable and attractive phenomenon in the York collection is the frequent occurrence of strophes, of which the opening song has terminal rhymes and consists of the alliterative long lines. The majority of the plays referring to the *Passion* are written in this form, which is also found in other places. But shorter verses, such as are formed by syllabification, also show alliteration—however inconsistently carried out. These and other artificial touches remind us of Laurence Minot, and as in his case we shall also here have to take into account influences coming from



the west. But it is a very questionable point whether these western influences have also affected the dramatic composition beyond the metre and style. We have already remarked that, in the composition of the drama, the west received more from Northumbria than it was able to give in return.\*

The influence of the York Corpus Christi Plays discernible in the Woodkirk Mysteries must also have had some effect on the drama of the Northumbrian districts. We possess only one catalogue of the cycle which used to be acted at Beverley on Corpus Christi Day. References to these exhibitions extend from the year 1407 to 1604. This catalogue,† however, shows a few important points of agreement with the order of the York plays. The pageant of *Adam and Seth* is peculiar to Beverley, and is no doubt the dramatic form given to some tradition known in connection with the legend of the Cross.

Farther to the north, Newcastle-upon-Tyne had its own Corpus Christi Plays. The references in the guild-books to these Newcastle plays go no further back than 1426, but come down to near the close of the sixteenth century. We know the contents of sixteen separate plays; amongst these the *Burial of the Virgin* also occurs. Only one pageant is preserved, and unfortunately in a very modernized and corrupted form; it is the Ship-carpenters' play of *Noah's Ark*. The drama of the *Deluge* was thus divided here in the same way as at York; but, deviating from the York form, Noah's wife appears here even in the first part. It may be considered a questionable improvement here for God to open the piece, which was, indeed, usual, but yet not to tell his will to the patriarch directly, but only through the mediation of an angel. On the other hand, the spectators must have been vastly interested in the personality of the devil, who appears here in bodily form and visits old Mrs. Noah. He stirs her up against her husband and gives her a potion for him (presumably of the anticipated

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\* See Appendix.

† We see from this catalogue, among other things, that in the representation of the *Creation and Fall* at Beverley there were almost as many divisions of the subject as at York; and this seems the more remarkable as the Beverley cycle contains only thirty-six plays.



grape-vine), which intoxicates the patriarch and makes him babble out to his wife the revelations of God ; and quite delicious is Old Nick's assurance that he will also accompany Mrs. Noah on the ship !

When we turn from Northumbria to the north-western counties, we find evidence that towns like Kendal, Lancaster, Preston had exhibitions of Corpus Christi Plays ; but we can learn nothing definite of their nature. We are better informed about the religious drama in Chester. Here the guilds were wont to enact their collective Mysteries, not on Corpus Christi Day, but at Whitsuntide, and from Monday till Wednesday. The local tradition, which fixes the origin of these plays as far back as the year 1328 (or even as early as 1268), and which names the monk, Randulf Higden (or Randoll Higgenet), of St. Werburg-Abbey, as their author, or at least as the man who translated them into English, is not sufficiently proved and is not free from self-contradictions.

But although our accessible evidence and records are of much later date, it is, indeed, highly probable that the development of the dramatic cycle at Chester had begun, at the latest, by the middle of the fourteenth century. The position of the town itself almost makes our surmise into a clear connective proof that Chester was of considerable importance in the formation of the North-western Mysteries generally, and we cannot place their origin in this town later than 1350.

The Chester Whitsuntide Plays have been preserved in five manuscripts of the years 1591 to 1607. The groundwork of these extant plays is formed in the main by an edition previous to the year 1350, perhaps previous to 1325, although in some passages traces of a late editor may be discerned. We must here speak of an *edition* ; for the Chester plays show in their exterior form—in their phraseology and metre—a much greater harmony with each other than the parts of any other similar collections. In respect to metre, the same eight-lined doggerel rhyming stanza is seen throughout almost the whole cycle. The *Fall of Lucifer* and the play of *Christ in the Temple*, mixed up with the *Purification*

of the *Virgin*, form the only complete exceptions. In some other plays, the prevailing form of verse is interchanged with other systems—seldom with alliterative rhyming long lines,\* more frequently with strophes of short verses,† and among these—as in the speeches of the torturers in the *Passion* and the *Crucifixion*—there are some of a really vivid character, reminding us of Skelton's rhythm. The strophes formed after Chaucer's school belong to the later interpolator and are found in the first play of the *Three Kings*, or at the commencement of *Lazarus*.

In a few cases it is the style and rhythm, but more frequently it is the composition and contents, that point out the existence of earlier originals which the editors worked up, and in such a way that a critical study of the texts themselves gives us a glance into the Whitsuntide Mysteries of the fourteenth century.

There are twenty-four Chester Plays. As all the actions belonging to the original stock of the collective drama are here represented—with the exception of the *Baptism of Jesus*—and, as there is no lack of new, peculiar materials, we may see from this small number how great the tampering of the editors must have been. The *Creation of the Earth*, the *Fall of the First Man*, and the *First Fratricide*, are presented in one play, which is, indeed, preceded by the *Fall of the Angels* as an independent drama. In the same way the *Annunciation*, the *Visit to Elizabeth*, and the *Birth of Christ*, are worked into one pageant, and with these besides is blended the play of the *Emperor Octavian and The Sibel*. The whole history of the Passion, including the *Laying in the Sepulchre*, embraces only two dramas. It is the more strange that the play of the *Three Kings* should be divided here, as at York, into two parts.

In their present form the Chester Mysteries have a less popular character than those of York, or even of Woodkirk. A didactic, theologizing feature is observable in more than one respect. In many plays an expositor *ex machina* appears to explain the allegorical, or

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\* *Antichrist, Resurrection.*

† *Shepherds' Play, Passion, Crucifixion.*

prefigurative, meaning of the action. Hence, we have the peculiar selection of motives, such as "Melchizedek,"\* or "Balaam and his Ass,"† which do not occur elsewhere in the English Mysteries. In the Woodkirk cycle, and finally also in the York one, it is the intention of the dramatists to present the most vivid and effective picture possible in connection with the Biblical story; in the Chester plays the object often rather seems to be to give an exhaustive exposition of the Biblical text and to elucidate and paraphrase from second-hand stories.

A similar tendency is seen in the rather copious use made here of apocryphal traditions. In the play of *Christ's Birth*, the two midwives from the Proto-Gospel of James are not wanting; we have already spoken of the prophecies of *The Sibel*. Between the *Outpouring of the Holy Ghost* and the *Last Judgment*, two plays are intercalated, which are very characteristic of this collection, viz., *Ezekiel and the Fifteen Signs*, and *Antichrist*. The play of *Antichrist* cannot be compared in originality or depth of historic symbolism with the similarly named Latin drama of the time of Barbarossa. But the ideas which were most commonly held on this subject in the Middle Ages are here fully and vividly expressed. Antichrist himself opens the play; in his speech he lauds himself as the Messiah, in whom the predictions of the prophets should be fulfilled. He works miracles, brings the dead to life, and raises himself again from the dead. The Kings of the Earth, represented by four nameless titularies, now believe in his mission and offer him sacrifice and homage; he imparts to them his holy spirit and bestows on them the kingdoms of the world. Enoch and Elias now appear, in order to put down the domination of this Antichrist. They prove the hollowness of his miracles by offering to those he has raised from the dead some bread which Elias has blessed in the name of the Trinity; full of fear they cannot eat, but turn away. The kings now perceive that they have been deluded, and are converted to Jesus, the true Christ. Antichrist, however, has his

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\* In the fourth play, joined to the *Sacrifice of Isaac*.

† In the fifth play, joined on to the *Giving of the Law by Moses*.

revenge, for he kills Enoch and Elias and the rebellious kings, and again ascends his throne. But now the Archangel Michael comes and puts Antichrist to death. His body is carried off by devils; Enoch and Elias arise from the dead and follow the Archangel into heaven. The play of the *Descent to Hell* has for basis the same version of the Gospel of Nicodemus as the corresponding Yorkshire drama; but the Chester Mystery follows the original still more closely.

Here the many points of similarity to the story of the *Cursor Mundi* \* are owing to the general plan of this cycle. On the other hand it is scarcely by accident that these Chester Plays should have a greater resemblance to the French Mysteries than the other English cycles have.

But the connection between the religious dramas of Chester and those of other English centres is more interesting to us. Powerful influences came in two directions to this city on the Irish Sea—from the East Midlands and from Yorkshire.

The story of *Abraham's Sacrifice* in the fourth Chester Play has been taken from an East-Anglian source—and, indeed, from that fourteenth century drama of which the characteristic merits seem to be preserved intact in the Brome play of *Abraham and Isaac* which we already know.

The connection with the Yorkshire Mystery is seen most strikingly in the dramatizing of *Jesus in the Temple*, † which is nothing but a curtailed and rather superficial revision of the play found in both the Woodkirk and York collections. Besides, there are many less tangible but not less important points of similarity in other plays. The character of Noah's wife, for instance, and her relation to her husband, are conceived in exactly the same way as in the York play of the *Deluge*; and a motive, ‡ here occurring for the first time, viz., the desire of the wife to take her relatives and gossips with her into the ark, appears in the corresponding Chester drama with greatly heightened effect. § On the whole,

\* See this work, vol. i. pp. 287–289.

† As we already observed, this action is joined in the Chester cycle in the same play with the *Purification of the Virgin*.

‡ *York Plays*, p. 49, line 141 ff.

§ Chester Plays, p. 52 ff. Compare especially the Song of the Gossips, p. 53.



York has certainly contributed more than Woodkirk to the Chester Whitsuntide Mysteries. But the *Shepherds' Play* in the Chester cycle has nothing corresponding to it in the collection at York, and we may therefore assume that it is mainly dependent on the Woodkirk influence, which received, indeed, an independent and singular revision at Chester. It affords us a rustic picture of the locality and age, which is as snugly and distinctly sketched out as are the corresponding Yorkshire Plays, but it is not so bold and fine, nor so happily conceived, as in the first of the York Plays. So, also, in this Chester *Shepherds' Play*, we are introduced to a rustic banquet, which is followed by a wrestling match, where the shepherd boy, Trowle, a sort of pastoral Gamelyn, throws his three employers one after the other.

Let us now give a concise review of the Chester cycle, which, however, we do not possess in the original form. Unquestionably it is neither so original nor so important as the two Yorkshire collections; and though many portions of it are not deficient in vivid description, and some parts even possess pathos and humor, it is, nevertheless, generally surpassed even in these respects by the York cycle, or by that of Woodkirk, frequently by both together, and it seldom rises to their popular strength and freshness.

The Dublin religious drama must have been largely indebted to that of Chester. There were Corpus Christi Plays in the Irish capital from at least the fifteenth century, but unfortunately very little is known of their nature. The general contents of thirteen or fourteen pageants are known, and also the names of the guilds which exhibited them. Among these the play acted by the Weavers has been preserved, viz., *Abraham and Isaac*, and its metrical form reminds us at once of the Chester cycle. The treatment of the subject also shows a certain relationship to the similarly named Chester Play, and also to the East Anglian one, and is distinguished by its touching pathos. But this Dublin play has an original touch (which is characteristic of the Irishman's gallantry and deference to ladies\*): in the

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\*Translator.



English dramas, Sarah is only referred to as a psychological motive in the minds of Isaac and Abraham, but in the Dublin Pageant, she comes personally on the stage and immensely raises the interest and importance of the action.

If we go from Chester southward through the Welsh Marches, following the course of the Severn, we come upon the towns of Shrewsbury, Worcester, Tewkesbury, whose names are all recorded in the annals of the English drama, though not in very prominent positions. On reaching Worcester, particularly, we hear of five pageants of the year 1467, which the guilds enacted on Corpus Christi Day.

Down in Cornwall, in the southwestern corner of Britain, the whole Mysteries were brought out in the local Celtic dialect in the course of the fourteenth century. We possess an early text, which contains three portions, viz., *The Creation of the World*, the *Passion*, and the *Resurrection of the Lord*, and which therefore really covers the entire subject of the Corpus Christi Plays; and there is also a much later text, which treats only of the *Creation of the World*. We are prevented from discussing the comparative merits of these Cornish Mysteries, owing to the plan of this work, which professes to examine only the English productions of the English mind.

In the West Saxon districts we find very few places with a record of regular exhibitions of Biblical dramas; although presumably such dramas have been there exhibited. Only from the northern side of the West Saxons, viz., from Reading on the Thames, have we any testimony of such dramas, and that for the years 1498 to 1557. The *Passion* was played there on Palm Sunday; the *Resurrection* at Easter, the *Adoration of the Three Kings* at Whitsuntide. Performances were also given on Corpus Christi Day. The names of plays like *Adam* and *Cain* indicate the beginning of a series; but we cannot say whether, or how often, it was performed in its entirety.

In Kent, Canterbury comes most into consideration; for not only were separate plays enacted there, but we

know definitely that in the time of Henry VI. there were also Corpus Christi Plays performed by the guilds.

In the great emporium of London, as may be easily imagined, there were representations of different sorts, among which were Biblical dramas, and whole cycles of Mysteries also were here frequently performed. But we are not justified in assuming that the cyclic drama was ever here thoroughly established (either for Corpus Christi Day or for Whitsuntide) into a firmly rooted and permanent institution, as at York or Chester.

The counties lying in the centre of the country still await our consideration. The dramatic reputation of other places, such as Leicester, was here far outshone by the fame of Coventry, which must have taken a position not only in the Midlands, but in the whole South, similar to that held by York in Northumbria. The performances at Coventry in the fifteenth century, especially its Corpus Christi Plays, drew spectators from far and near. Even kings of England frequently honored it with a visit. In 1416 Henry V. and his nobles are said to have been delighted with its plays. On Corpus Christi Day, 1456, Queen Margaret was present incognito at the performance of the whole cycle, and Richard III. in 1484. It is recorded of Henry VII.\* that on two occasions he stopped at Coventry for a similar purpose.

Reliable information about the Corpus Christi Plays performed by the guilds at Coventry extends as far back as 1392, and points to a still earlier period. Numerous entries referring to these plays in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are contained in the rolls of the guild office of that town, and especially in the account-books of many separate guilds; and scientific criticism has drawn from them the most and the best of what we know about the way in which such plays were performed, about the arrangement of the stage, the costumes and equipment, and all such matters. Unfortunately there is no complete authentic text of the plays themselves, by which we could have elucidated and combined those entries,

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\* In 1486 he is said to have been present at the performance of the pageants on St. Peter's Day; and in 1492, accompanied by the queen, he witnessed the plays performed by the Franciscans. Of these latter we shall soon have to speak.

and which, on the other hand, with the help of the entries could have been formed into a perfectly vivid picture. Of the character of the Corpus Christi Plays at Coventry, in the period of their power and glory, we are unable to form to ourselves any exact idea. The annals of the town and the guild books attest that the dramatic activity by no means ceased when the cycle had been completed, but was busied with the touching up, the curtailing, or the new creation of plays. What is preserved, however, of the Corpus Christi Plays of the guilds is confined to two pageants in a very late and greatly corrupted text—viz., the play of the *Weavers* and that of the *Barbers and Tailors*; the texts of both belong to the year 1334, and are due to the editorial activity of a certain Robert Croo.

The pageant of the *Weavers* treats of the "Purification of the Virgin," and in a somewhat loose connection therewith, of "Jesus in the Temple." It is here very interesting to observe again how the latter play—excepting an introductory scene and an extension towards the end—is a thorough reproduction of the old Northumbrian play (probably originated at York) on this same subject, and which has, therefore, spread equally to the West and to the South. In the *Purification of the Virgin* the characterization of Joseph merits special attention. He is represented as a comfortable old fellow, who has some difficulty in deciding to carry out the divinely inspired orders of his young spouse, and who, with sighs, allows himself to be led by his wife's apron-strings.

Further tampering is seen in the play of the *Barbers and Tailors*, whose old account-books are unfortunately lost. It covers an entire Christmas Mystery. Isaiah introduces the action, as representative of the ancient prophets; then follow the Annunciation, Joseph's grief at Mary's Pregnancy, and the Birth of the Saviour, which is blended with the *Shepherds' Play*. A singular intermezzo then introduces two "prophets" contemporary with the time of the action; and these two discuss—the one questioning, the other answering and instructing—with theological diffusiveness, the great event that has just taken place. And it is here remarkable that a scene

exactly similar is made to serve as prologue to the other Coventry Play, viz., the *Weavers' Pageant*.—The second part of the piece is taken up with the *Adoration of the Kings*, the *Flight to Egypt*, and the *Slaughter of the Innocents at Bethlehem*. The varied nature of the plays here placed together is occasionally very evident—even the rhythm is sometimes different ; but here, as in the Weavers' Play, many a passage and many a verse have been incurably mutilated in the course of transmission. And, what is worse, certain necessary parts of the action have been sacrificed in the desire for shortness or for some other purpose, perhaps simply from negligence. And yet we can perceive remains of former beauty, traces of a poetic and tender conception, amidst pedantic and clumsy portions, or beside the extravagant swaggering of Herod and the wearisome discussions of the two “ prophets.”

By studying these fragments in connection with the account-books of the guilds, and trying to get an idea of the whole Corpus Christi Plays at Coventry, we seem to discover some points of resemblance to the Chester Plays, and in many pieces a connection with the Northumbrian Mysteries, especially with those of York. This may be partly due to the common influences received from the East Midlands ; but it is also doubtless due in part to a borrowing from the North, as in the play of *Jesus in the Temple*.

Besides the guilds, the Franciscans are said also to have enacted plays at Coventry. Their performances are not so well attested as we could wish, but are, nevertheless, verified in such a way that it would be silly to pronounce them a pure fiction. Though it is scarcely possible now to form an idea of the relation between this activity of the friars and that of the craftsmen, the assumption will not be easily refuted that at the end of the Middle Ages and up to the year 1538 (when their monastery was dissolved) the Minorites of Coventry had a certain rivalry with the guildsmen in the Corpus Christi Plays.

The celebrated Cotton Collection, now in the British Museum, contains a manuscript, for the most part belonging to the year 1468, which offers almost the complete text



of a whole cycle of Mysteries. This dramatic cycle was considered at the beginning of the seventeenth century as the Corpus Christi Plays of the Franciscans of Coventry, and in spite of occasional doubts it has maintained this reputation with the masses and even with many critics up to the present day. But the tradition which gives to this Collection the name of the *Ludus Conventricæ*, or *Coventry Mysteries*, is by no means sufficiently proved, and serious considerations can be urged against its credibility. In the prologue, or announcement, of the entire play by three standard-bearers, who speak in turn, reference is made in the final strophe, as has been pointed out by others, to the performance by a company of wandering players rather than by a settled body of Franciscans; and although this prologue may only have an external and rather loose connection with the Mysteries themselves, nevertheless its age gives it a greater authority than the opposite tradition can claim. And what is more important is the fact that the language of these Mysteries, such as they exist at present, shows for the most part a coloring which points rather to the north-east of the Midlands than to the neighborhood of Coventry. And above all, the contents of the whole cycle are of a very mixed character and seem to have been put together in a rather casual way.

It is not only single plays that can be here detected as earlier elements in the entire collection, but whole groups of plays can be separated from their surroundings. The plays relating to the Legends of the Virgin, beginning with the *Barrenness of Anna*, and ending with the *Visit to Elizabeth*, form a smaller cycle inside the larger one, and have a separate prologue and epilogue. At the commencement of the story of *Christ's Trial and Passion*, we learn that these plays are portions of a whole, whose first part (viz., the *Entrance into Jerusalem*, *Last Supper*, *Betrayal*, and *Arrest*) had been performed in the preceding year. It is therefore evident that the collection of the so-called Coventry Mysteries has arisen in some way very different to that of the cycle of Woodkirk or York, and is the exact contrast to the Chester cycle, which reveals the smoothing hand of an editor; these



Coventry Plays seem the product of a purely external agency, which has placed the most heterogeneous elements side by side without consideration.

But these elements, or the majority of them, must have received their present form not long before the origin of the present manuscript, and in districts not very far apart. This may be the reason why, with all their differences in other respects, there are certain kindred traits common to the most of them. On the other hand, we could thus explain why these "Coventry Mysteries," in spite of the earlier date of their origin, have a decidedly younger appearance than the Chester Plays, and are particularly instructive for the development of the religious drama in the fifteenth century.

As in the Whitsuntide Plays of Chester, there is visible also in these Coventry Plays a theologizing, edifying, didactic tendency, which takes the drama, now well advanced in years, almost back to the days of its liturgical childhood. But with this there is united in a much larger degree the epic and lyrical tendency cultivated by Chaucer's school,—in the Chester Plays this tendency is only observable in a few intercalated passages. This imitating gives sometimes a twisted appearance, sometimes an insipid pedantry, to the style of mediocre dramatists, which reminds us of the wooden manner of the *meistersingers*. Frequently also the poets or adapters cannot manage the difficult forms of verse, so that the heroic verse is often turned into the alliterative long line, and in other cases both these metres are confounded with the short line of four accented syllables. It is a sign of the times when we see apocryphal sources yielding a larger quota to the contents of this collection than in any other case we have met. We here refer especially to the legends which have been woven round the figure of the Virgin Mary. Compositions like the *Gospel of the Virgin's Birth* and the *Protogospel of St. James* are used here, whether directly or indirectly, much more largely than elsewhere. The above-named plays about the Virgin bring in much new material, not generally employed in the other collections, and are followed by a play in an entirely different tone, viz., the *Trial of*

*Joseph and Mary*, also a subject which is dramatized in no other cycle. In the pageant of the *Resurrection* the risen Christ appears to his Mother first of all. A later hand has then also enriched the Codex by a play on *Mary's Ascension*, where we see worked up into one piece the motives which occupy three different pageants\* in the York Corpus Christi Plays. The form of the language in this drama, for which the *Golden Legend* seems to have supplied the material, deviates somewhat from the dialect prevailing in the rest of the cycle, and points to a more northern district.

It is a further sign of the times that in these so-called Coventry Mysteries the devil plays a very considerable part, and confines himself by no means merely to the pageants where he is absolutely required. The growing importance and popularity of Old Nick towards the end of the Middle Ages was also observable in the Newcastle Play of the *Deluge*.

It is finally a sign of the times that the personification of abstract ideas begins to find its way into the Biblical drama. In the play of the *Annunciation* and *Conception*, the old and beautiful parable of the four daughters of God is dramatized, where *Truth*, *Mercy*, *Righteousness*, and *Peace* discuss the future destiny of sinful man.† In the pageant of the *Slaughter of the Innocents*, "Death" appears upon the scene as the instrument of the divine vengeance which falls upon Herod. The expositor,‡ in doctor's gown, whom we meet in many parts of the collection, bears the name of "Contemplacio."

Upon the whole, the Mysteries are here seen at a stage where they have begun to lose very much of their popular freshness and their felicitous simplicity. Formerly we were accustomed to meet with impudent and saucy humor, but here we generally find only a grave, insipid, rigid tone, even Noah's wife has changed her character and lost her old attractiveness. We are badly

\* Namely, in the plays on the *Death*, the *Burial*, the *Ascension*, and *Coronation* of the Virgin Mary. The pageant of the *Burial* ("Fergus") is, as we know, lost from the York collection. On the other hand we find nothing in the "Coventry Mysteries" corresponding to the *Vision of St. Thomas*.

† See this work, vol i. p. 355. The parable goes back to an earlier Jewish tradition, which was annexed to a well-known passage in the Psalms.

‡ He is so characterized at p. 287.

repaid for such losses by a number of coarse jokes in other places, or, indeed, by the indelicate treatment of very delicate points in the *Trial of Joseph and Mary*.

In the "Coventry Mysteries," however, some actions are presented with much dramatic force ; many attractive motives and touching scenes are not wanting. Even the keeping close to tradition produces frequently a deep impression in so sublime a subject. The diction sometimes rises to a real pathos, especially in the history of the Passion. Perception for dramatic effect, and at the same time deep sentiment, are expressed, for instance, in the episode of *Mary at the foot of the Cross*.

O my sone ! my sone ! my derlyng dere !  
 What have I defendyd the ?  
 Thou hast spoke to alle tho that ben here,  
 And not o word thou spekyst to me !

To the Jewys thou art ful kende,  
 Thou hast forgive al here mysdede ;  
 And the thef thou hast in mende,  
 For onys harkyng mercy before is his mede.

A ! my sovereyn Lord, why whylt thou not speke  
 To me that am thi modyr in peyn for thi wrong !  
 A ! hert ! hert ! why whylt thou not breke !  
 That I were out of this sorroe so stronge ! \*

Jesus recommends his mother to the beloved disciple, and offers her consolation. With the most violent affection Mary falls upon the cross, embracing it. Everybody is most assiduous about her, tries to quiet her, and to take her away from the cross. Magdalene reminds her of the sufferings of Jesus, which may be only increased by a sight of hers. But the distracted mother answers : " I pray you all, leave me here and hang me on this wood beside my dear Son, for where he is, there is my place."

In spite of their comparatively modern date, the "Coventry Mysteries" sometimes show a close connection with very old models. In the description of the first fratricide there is a remarkable similarity to the Anglo-Norman Mystery of *Adam*. The play of the *Descent to*

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\* *Coventry Mysteries*, p. 322.

*Hell*, which is blended in the text in question with the *Resurrection*,\* contains verbal resemblances to the old drama on the *Harrowing of Hell*.

This cycle, then, so hard to localize, with its rich contents and its unique origination, offers to literary criticism in every sense the most attractive, but at the same time the most difficult, problems.

## V.

Besides the subjects already mentioned, we have only scant materials for writing a history of the English Mysteries in the fifteenth century. A twofold drama of Northumbrian origin, which was probably composed between the years 1430 and 1460, is found in the *Burial and Resurrection of Christ*. The first part was intended for performance on the afternoon of Good Friday, and the second part for Easter Sunday morning. This sublime subject is here treated in a thoroughly worthy and church-like fashion. Everything which might disturb the devotion is avoided ; not only comic elements, but all coarse realisms, are entirely absent. All the performing personages belong to the congregation of the Saints—Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, the three Marys, the Holy Virgin, the Apostles, besides an Angel and Jesus himself. A few interspersed Church hymns in Latin give the action a liturgical appearance. The dramatic has scarcely any dependence on the external action—that is, on the play itself ; it is concentrated almost exclusively on the sentiments and feelings of the characters portrayed, and on the way they open their hearts in their discourses ; and the impression of the momentous events, which precede the drama or are contained therein, is by these means brought home to the spectator. The composition is therefore equally adapted for reading or for acting, and in a short prologue added by a later editor this has been well perceived. Such manner of treatment, if it is at all allowable, presupposes a certain inventiveness in the breast of the writer, and, above all, a

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\* See Appendix.

really intrinsic merit. The unknown poet of this drama has shown that he possessed both these qualities, especially in the first part, where the want of action becomes almost palpable. The tragedy of the *Burial* contains some eight hundred and fifty lines, and consists solely of pathetic scenes, which the poet, however, well knew how to intensify and shade off. Among these some narrative passages are interwoven with great skill. The task which was to be accomplished here was, perhaps, the most difficult a mediæval English dramatist ever undertook. The way in which it was performed shows one side of Northumbria's mental endowment at the summit of its power.

This drama also shows the influence of Chaucer's school, or perhaps even that of the master himself—viz., in the profusion of pathetic expressions, and in the interspersed seven-lined stanzas, which are sometimes interchanged with other rhythms according to a fixed principle, and with great effect. The lines, such as they have been preserved, are sometimes very bad ; but the poet may not have been a very good artist at verses.

The invaluable Codex which contains the York Corpus Christi Plays also contains, at the end, the fragment of a play written by a later hand, which must have been composed about 1483, and was intended to supply the place of the older pageants of *Mary's Ascension and Coronation*. In verses of heroic lines, frequently too long, and in eight-lined strophes, the diction solemnly proceeds, full of learned reminiscences, but often as if on stilts. At the very beginning God the Son addresses the Father as "Shining Phœbus"!\*

A Midland drama of similar strophic form, apparently belonging to about the same period, depicts† the *Slaughter of the Innocents at Bethlehem* (and the *Flight to Egypt*) in connection (though merely external) with the *Purification of the Virgin*. This work is thoroughly characteristic of the time of the decline of the mediæval Mysteries. The verses are quite as hobbling as the description is

\* York Plays, p. 514, line 1 f. "Hayle! fulgent Phœbus and fader eternall, Parfite plasmator and God omnipotent," etc.

† Candlemas Day and the *Kylling of the Children of Israel*. See Appendix.



dull. Herod has become somewhat tame in his swaggering, but in his character this can hardly be considered an advantage. An attempt at comedy has been made by the poet in the character of Watkyn. Watkyn, a servant and messenger of Herod, desires to be dubbed a Knight, and therefore feels it necessary to play the bully. But conflicting with this desire is his fear of arms, especially of the distaffs of the women—a fear which he most ingenuously expresses, and which at last turns out only too well justified after his participation in the slaughter of the children. If we overlook the most horrible and bloody background in which this episode is laid, we must recognize that it contains the effective elements for low comedy, at least in its conception.\* But the poet has not succeeded in making the character of his Watkyn intelligible, nor in carrying it out consistently.

From the prologue to this double play we perceive that the *Worship of the Shepherds and the three Kings* had been performed before the spectators in the previous year; from the epilogue we learn that *Jesus in the Temple* was to be performed in the year following.†

There is a greater attraction in the play of *St. Paul's Conversion*, on account of its hitherto unused material; it also arose in the Midlands and is written in seven-lined strophes. It is very important also from the fact that it is the first extant example of a play with divisions corresponding somewhat to the modern arrangement into acts. The three sections, indeed, into which the drama falls, are called in the language of the poet, "Stations," and have to the stage and place where they were played the same relation as the separate pageants of a cycle. But as the entire action here exhibits a thoroughly complete whole (though unfortunately not completed), and as the entire play forms a uniform poem,

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\* The conception, however, is not quite original, even in the domain of the middle English drama. In the Mysteries of Woodkirk and Chester, the unhappy mothers also fall upon the murderous servants of the king; in the Chester Play, as in this one, the distaff is also the weapon, and there, too, the first *miles* is a powerful Bramarbas. On the other hand, in the pageant of the *Cloth Cutters and Tailors of Coventry* both the soldiers have some misgivings—not from fear, but from humanity—about carrying out Herod's orders.

† Candlemas is generally taken as the day of the performance, but the prologue rather points to the festival of St. Anna.

the divisions, therefore, arise more from the internal than from external causes, and have nothing whatever to do with custom or convention. Besides, the poet, although a little better than the author of the play last mentioned, is in no way above the level of the ordinary dramatists of that age. His treatment of the subject betrays his feeble dramatic power, and, indeed, falls palpably off towards the end. The first act rouses at least some expectations, and, owing to a rough jocular intermezzo, it also possesses a certain diversity. The intermezzo takes place between Saul's servant and a supercilious stable-boy, who has to give up the horse for the journey to Damascus. The second act, in which occurs the climax of the action, viz., Saul's conversion, has materially the greatest interest, and contains a few passages very vividly conceived. The third act, on the other hand, is very unsatisfactory, with the long-winded sermon of St. Paul on the Seven Deadly Sins, and with its disjointed action, which breaks off just at the critical moment. It is possible that an interpolator perceived the necessity of enlivening in some measure this part of the drama by inserting a scene between the roaring, howling, and intriguing devils, in the form of Belial and his servant Mercury.

## VI.

Of the Middle English Miracle Plays, in the stricter sense, almost nothing is preserved. For the dramatized Legends of the Virgin, in the so-called Coventry cycle, or even in the York Corpus Christi Plays, cannot be counted here, owing to their close connection with the action of the Mysteries, nor a play like *Paul's Conversion*, because of its Biblical contents. Besides, our knowledge of the dramatic treatment of Lives of the Saints, or Miracles of the Saints, is confined to traditional names—names like Catherine, Christine, Fabian, Crispin and Crispian, Botulf, etc. We may be able, however, to form a general idea of the nature of such dramas if we imagine the various Legends of the

Saints paraphrased in dialogue and action into the simple technology of the Mysteries.

It is harder to say how it stood with the *Play of the Credo*, mentioned in the records of York. This play, together with the books and banners belonging to it, was bequeathed, in 1446, to the Corpus Christi Guild,\* existing at York since 1408, by one of its members, a priest named William Revetor; and according to his will it was afterwards acted by the brotherhood every tenth year at Lammas. Reliable signs justify us in concluding that it was by no means a recent play even in the year 1446, and that it was a well known and favorite piece. When Richard III. came to York for his second coronation, in the autumn of 1483, the local city authorities had the play acted for him on the 7th of September—certainly out of its ordinary course. The drama was of very great length, and was therefore probably a small cycle. The twelve articles of the *Credo* may have been represented by twelve pageants, but how? Were the contents of each article presented to view as a symbolic drama? In that case, the whole, like the separate parts, would have belonged to the Mystery species. Or was the origin of each article referred to one of the Apostles, according to the well-known tradition? Or, finally, did each separate case treat of the wondrous recompense or punishment for belief or unbelief?

Among other Miracles, those were very popular which referred to the Sacrament of the Altar. A multitude of legends treat of this theme: bad men, generally Jews, manage to get possession of a consecrated host, which they then defile, pierce it with daggers or bodkins, and throw it into the fire or boiling oil. Blood flows from the violated host, and in the fire, or wherever else it has been thrown, Christ's figure appears in his glorified form. The miracle and the crime that causes it are manifested; the venerable host is conducted solemnly to the church and receives special adoration; the guilty are generally punished terribly. A miracle of this sort, said to have taken place at Heraclea in Arragon, in 1461, is dramatized in an English play, which must

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\* See above, p. 278.

necessarily be of about the same date, and must therefore have affected contemporaries with the whole force of its recent occurrence. A rich merchant, Aristorius, of Heraclea, who introduces himself to the public in the same way as the Herods or Pilates of the Mystery Plays generally do, has as his house-companion a priest, Brother Isidore. Isidore guards the key of his church rather carelessly, and even forgets to lock the tabernacle door. A very rich Jew, Jonathas, offers the Christian merchant, who is eager to make money, a hundred pounds for procuring him a consecrated host. Counting on the negligence and the deep sleep of Mr. Isidore, the merchant completes the bargain; the Jew receives the host, and the Christian Judas the hundred pounds. Jonathas now begins at once, with the help of his four servants and accomplices, his horrible experiments with the Holy Sacrament, and does not even stop when its wondrous power is revealed by manifest signs and to his own hurt. This whole scene is carried out with great vividness and realism. There is also here a comic intermezzo of great effect. Jonathas has lost his right hand in his criminal experiments. This now forms a motive for the introduction of the miracle doctor, Mr. Brundyche, and his servant Colle; the satire of this scene is developed in a coarse, humorous style, and to unpretentious spectators it is really delightful. The quack doctor comes to knock at Jonathas's door, and offers him his medical assistance. The Jew, however, declines his aid; but the doctor's servant is so insisting that both at last are driven off with blows. The Jews still continue their criminal business till the appearance and voice of the Saviour induce them to desist. The repentent Jonathas, who by God's favor has had his hand restored, now hurries to the Bishop and confesses all. The Bishop repairs to the sinner's house; the sanctified host is brought in solemn procession into the church. The report of the new miracle spreads; Aristorius repents of his crime and does penance; Mr. Isidore gets off with a strong pastoral exhortation; the Jews confess publicly their guilt and desire baptism, which the Bishop administers to them. Thus ends the *Play of the Sacrament*, in



this case without torture or execution, and to the joy and edification of all. According to the prologue, the drama was performed in one of those numerous English places which bear the name of Croxton, but the language proves that it was at any rate in an East Midland Croxton, possibly in Leicestershire, Cambridgeshire, or Norfolk.

The *Play of St. George* was widely spread in England, and was mostly performed on St. John's Day, when a solemn procession was formed. In many places this drama may have absorbed the remains of native traditions of a very early date.

Ancient memories and old beliefs displayed their vitality in the annual festivals as celebrated by the people, especially so on the evening of St. John's Day and on the eve of Saints Peter and Paul. The houses were adorned with leaves, fires were kindled, watches were placed, sometimes to guard posts, sometimes to move along in processions, on foot or on horseback, with men in harness and the figures of giants and dragons, and sometimes also with the devil in a dress of feathers. At Chester the performance of the Mysteries of Whitsuntide was sometimes exchanged for the *Play of the Wake* on St. John's eve; when the former was omitted, the latter was performed. The best known is the celebration of May Day; on the first of the May-moon people flocked out under the open sky to do homage to May, to introduce it solemnly, to bring home May trees, and plant them before their houses. The plays and dances which took place at this festival were accompanied also by performances from the legends of Robin Hood. A *Play of Robin Hood* of the sixteenth century is still extant; it places on the dramatic scene well known characters from the ballad cycle, such as Robin Hood, Brother Tuck, Little John, the Proud Potter, and others.

The play, frequently performed by the guilds of Coventry on Tuesday in the second week after Easter (the so-called Hock Tuesday\*), had an historic background. It referred to the celebration of England's liberation from

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\* Older forms: Hoke-day, Hoke-tide, Hoke-Tuesday, also Hox-Tuesday. The annals of Coventry (Sharpe, *A Dissertation*, p. 8) suppose Hox-Tuesday "invented" in the year 1416; but the annals affirm the same about the pageants, *i. e.*, the Corpus Christi Plays, which is certainly inappropriate.



the Danish yoke ; and the memory of Hardicanute's death, on June 8, 1042, was here probably mixed up with the memory of the massacre of the Danes on November 13, 1002. As far as we can learn, the main stress in the *Play of the Men of Coventry* seems to have been laid upon a grand military conflict—a great battle between men in armor ; and the performance seems to have been not altogether a dumb show, but sometimes accompanied by rhymes.

English towns frequently gave additional splendor to the solemn entry of their princes, especially after the middle of the fourteenth century, by getting up pageants—generally not of a really dramatic sort. At certain points along the way where the procession had to pass, richly ornamented scaffoldings were erected, with figures from sacred or profane history, from legend or tradition, or even with allegorical conceptions. Short addresses, greetings, congratulations, respects, were written in poetic form upon the scaffoldings, or spoken by the persons standing thereon. Songs were also frequently given. Movable scaffolds, also, formed an element of the festival procession. The entry of the Lord Mayor into the City of London was celebrated in the same way, at least since the sixteenth century. Court poets, like John Lydgate, found in this sort of princely pageants a welcome opportunity of exhibiting their powers, and that in a twofold manner : the text for the songs and addresses had to be composed ; and it was also sometimes thought desirable to immortalize the whole solemnity by poetic description. These pageants, moreover, must have had in many cases the form of pantomimic dramas, similar to the *Mystères Mimés* in France, with which they were probably connected, and which by no means always treated Biblical or even religious subjects.

The English princes had, on the other hand, their own plays at court, as is attested by documents since the time of Edward III., and these certainly did not consist solely of pantomimes and masquerades. In the pauses between the courses at state banquets, performances of all sorts were in general favor, and from this arose the name of *Interlude* as appellation for a dramatic poem of very elastic character.

Even in the earliest English times the Mead Hall was accustomed to resound not only with the epic singer's lay ; for poems in dialogue were also oft recited, as the *Seafarer*\* informs us ; and there the real mime, the jester, was probably no unknown guest, however often absent. The productions with which the Anglo-Norman *Jongleurs* were accustomed to regale their chiefs and princes were no doubt largely in dialogue, and frequently in dramatic form. In such an atmosphere a purely secular comic drama could easily grow up. Where the epic farce, the poetic contest in dialogue form, and the impromptu jests of the buffoon and the mimes, were already to hand, it was an easy step to put their contents into dialogue and action.

When the English language was beginning to suppress the French, some dramatic farces were even then being composed. Any considerable development of this species was, however, impossible at a time when the interest in native compositions was limited to the burgess classes, and when the religious drama, in the heyday of its reign, drew the whole attention to itself. But we have already seen, especially in the country *Mysteries of Woodkirk*, how the farce within the religious drama itself was gaining a decided recognition.

One independent dramatic farce of that early time is, indeed, extant, although in a fragmentary form. We have the beginning—presumably somewhat more than a third of the whole—of an *Interlude de Clerico et Puella*, which was probably composed in the reign of Edward I., and in the South-Northumbrian dialect. We cannot determine among what classes this Interlude was performed ; the author, like his hero, appears to have been a clerk, a student. The fable in the play is already known to us ; it is the same as that in the not much older poetic romance of *Dame Siriz*.† Instead of the merchant's wife Margery, there is here a young girl named Maria ; the procuress is named Aunt Elwis. The course of the action is in other respects, as far as

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\* See this work, vol. i. pp. 61, 63.

† See this work, vol. i. p. 255 ff.

we can see, perfectly similar. This subject was easily dramatized, and we recollect how the original story runs off in a few scenes, and almost wholly in the form of dialogue. It is also interesting to observe that the dramatist had really some notion of the high demands of his art. As far as the fragment goes—only three characters appear, and, if we do not count the puppy, there were probably no more—not one of these characters, however, introduces himself. We get to know these only from the dialogue, and the dialogue is all action. Without circumlocution, the poet goes straight to the point. The Clerk, entering Maria's house, says :

A beautiful good morning to you, miss.

*Maria.* You are welcome, sir, by Saint Michael.

*Clerk.* Where is your father ? where is your mother ?

*Maria.* By God, neither of them is at home.

*Clerk.* The man must be happy who gets such a maid for his wife.

*Maria.* Out, out, by God and Saint Leonard ! For loose lovers and promise-breaking clerks, I have no room in house or hall . . .

We are thus set right into the middle of the action at a stroke. When the paramour is refused and sent off, in a second scene we see him immediately visiting the house of the procuress. "God bless you, Aunt Elwis," he says. No monologue, no consultation with a friend for advice, allows the interest to slacken. Everything of that sort is simply taken for granted. The Clerk says to Aunt Elwis, "They sent me here for your help and advice." Compare with this the verbose clumsiness of the ordinary poet of *Mysteries* and *Miracles*, and not the English alone. The fragment breaks off in the middle of the second scene. Verbal similarities to *Dame Siriz*, especially in the speech of Aunt Elwis, prove that the poet was well acquainted with that English fabliau. This is so much the more interesting, as other signs would seem to show that he used a French original.\*

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\* See Appendix.

## VII.

Serious subjects also were represented in the Interludes. Well-to-do artisans may have many a time regaled themselves with a Miracle Play at their common festal dinner on the day of the patron of their guild. And since the Mystery had the greatest dramatic interest, it was here readily played as an Interlude—though perhaps generally only in pantomime. During the banquet at the Council of Constance, on January 24, 1417, the English Fathers caused to be performed, by tableaux and gestures, the *Birth of Christ*, the *Adoration of the Three Kings*, and the *Slaughter of the Innocents*, and invited the Council and many burgesses to the feast and exhibitions. Seventy years later, when Henry VII. was in Winchester at the birth of his eldest son, Prince Arthur, *Christ's Descent to Hell* was played before him, as an Interlude, by the choir boys.

And during the reign of this same king it happened that another species of drama, hitherto unmentioned, began to lay claim to the ground occupied by the Interludes—we mean the *Morality*. This species unites the Middle Ages with modern times in the history of the drama, and we must now consider it in the earlier stages of its development.

The MORAL PLAYS owe their origin to the same spirit that introduced the so-called allegorical tendency into religious literature and court poetry; viz., to the effort to illustrate moral doctrines and present abstract ideas in bodily form. Unfortunately the drama, as well as the romance, in so doing took the wrong path. Instead of illustrating the universal by the special, the distant by the near, the abstract and intellectual by the really concrete and personal,—in fact, instead of illustrating one thing by another (*ἀλληγορεῖν*),—writers were satisfied with raising the abstract substantive into a person, and with dressing out this personage according to its meaning and making it speak and act. The attributed powers of ingenuous thought and speech lent substance and personal effect to this ideal essence. It was only necessary to take



seriously the personifications and figures of speech, and to carry them through consistently, in order to complete the anthropomorphism. The step was easy enough; but it was thought a great thing to have done it. The subtlety of the age took a pleasure, as it were, in hunting abstractions to death, without being shocked by the gross incongruity arising from such consistency. Philosophic (not poetic) realism\* appears here at its height. Virtues and vices, mental faculties, inclinations, physical, spiritual, and moral influences form the persons of the Moral Plays, which included also the conception of species and collections, as Man and the human race, and naturally also God and the devil.

The Mysteries had undeniably a great influence on the formation of the Moral Plays. The latter followed the former in the arrangements of the stage, manner of performance, costume and equipment, and in important technical points; they had the persons of God and the devil in common, though these were fashioned according to necessity in both sorts of plays. Even the verbose style of the Mysteries seems to have been occasionally borrowed.

The oldest English Morality of which we have any record was called the *Play of the Paternoster*. Its first performance at York, which took place probably in the reign of Edward III., made so deep an impression, that a guild of men and women was formed expressly for the purpose of ensuring its more frequent and regular performance. In the year 1399 this guild contained more than a hundred members, not counting the women. It appears that the play formed a series, or cycle, of Moralities; the different parts opposed a vice or a sin to the corresponding virtue. The name of one of these parts has been preserved,† viz., the *Play of Laziness*. The relation of such contents to the *Paternoster* can at least be partly imagined from mediæval confession-books and moral tracts;‡ the whole probably contained seven sections.

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\* Contrast Nominalism.

† See Appendix.

‡ See for the application of the *Paternoster* in Dan Michel's *Ayenbite of Inwit*, vol. i. of this work, p. 286 (English edition).



The oldest extant Moral Plays belong to the time of Henry VI. *The Castle of Constancy*, *Spirit Will and Understanding*, and *Humanity*—all treat in various ways the same theme, viz., the conflict between good and evil in the soul of man. It is in fact the same subject, viz., the Fall and Redemption of Man, as is discussed in the Mysteries, where, however, it is considered as concrete and historical, while in the Moralities it is abstract and typical. Of these three plays, the *Castle of Constancy* was probably the most appreciated. It shows the greatest feeling for theatrical effect; we see the effort to throw as much as possible into external action, and also an endeavor to satisfy the eye by a rich display of scenery. The stage was of a circular form. In the centre rose a castellated structure, which gave the play its name; beneath it was seen a bed for the hero of the drama—viz., *Human Race* (*Humanum Genus*). At the circumference were four lesser stages, equally distant from each other and placed at the four points of the compass: in the East a stage for God, in the South for the Flesh, in the West for the World and in the North for the Devil, who is here called Belial. The action covers the whole life of the hero from birth to death. *Humanum Genus* appears as a new-born child, as a youth, as a man, and as a graybeard. As soon as the child appears upon the stage we see the Angel of Good and the Angel of Evil coming and speaking to him. He follows the Evil Angel and is led to Mundus (the World), who gives him Joy and Folly, and very soon also Slander, for his companions. By the latter—or, to stick to the literal expression of the poet, by this latter female personage—*Humanum Genus* is introduced to Greed, who soon presents to him the other Deadly Sins. We see the hero, when a young man, choosing Lust as his bed-fellow; and, in spite of the endeavors of his Good Angel, he continues in his sinful career until at length Repentance leads him to Confession. At forty years of age we see him in the *Castle of Constancy*, whither he has been brought by Confession, surrounded by the seven most excellent Virtues; and here the case becomes exactly similar to what we have already seen in the *Vision of*

*Piers Plowman*.\* The castle is surrounded by the three Evil Powers and the Seven Deadly Sins, with the Devil at their head, and with foot and horse is closely besieged. *Humanum Genus* commends himself to his general, who died on the cross ; but the Virtues valiantly defend the Castle ; and Love and Patience and their sisters cast roses down on the besiegers, who are thereby beaten black and blue, and forced to retire. But *Humanum Genus* in the meantime has become an old man, and now yields to the seductions of Greed, who has succeeded in creeping up to the castle walls. The old man quits the Castle and follows the seducer. His end is nigh at hand. The rising generation, represented by a Boy, demands of him his heaped-up treasures. And now Death and Soul appear upon the scene. Soul calls on Mercy for assistance ; but the Evil Angel takes *Humanum Genus* on its back and departs with him along the road to Hell. In this critical position of affairs the well-known argument begins, where Mercy and Peace plead before God on the one side, and Justice and Truth on the other. God decides in favor of Mercy ; Peace takes the soul of *Humanum Genus* from the Evil Angel, and Mercy carries it to God, who then pronounces the judgment—and afterwards the epilogue of the play.

Compared with the *Castle of Constasy*, *Spirit Will and Understanding* shows apparently greater theological learning and a more speculative mind, but has really less knowledge of the theatre and still less of the development of dramatic art. It satisfies the eye, however, by its rich costumes and the large number of figures got up in character ; yet among these there are eighteen dumb personages, who are merely presented to the spectator, and dance and quarrel among themselves. There is far too little action ; the long speeches between Wisdom (the second person of the Godhead) and the Soul are quite wearisome in a drama ; and even though a greater interest is excited by the scenes where the power of wickedness is effectively shown, the dialogue is nevertheless, as a whole, thoroughly undramatic ; we are told about things where the things themselves should be seen

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\* See this work, vol. i. p. 364 (English edition).

going on and presented vividly in the dialogue. The scene where Lucifer in the figure of a gay cavalier seduces the three Powers of the Soul, is, however, an exception. He begins by upbraiding them with contemplation and idleness. *Spirit* answers :

He is not idle who is with God.

*Lucifer.* But there is a time for everything: for praying, fasting, and working. Is it right that a man who has a wife and children and servants to support should lie on his side and live only for prayer and his own ease? He who acts thus is not from God; God was well pleased with Martha.

*Spirit.* Yes, but he was still better pleased with Mary.

*Lucifer.* But even the worst of the two had everlasting bliss. Is that not enough?

*Spirit.* The contemplative life is best.

*Lucifer.* I cannot think so: as for God himself, what sort of a life did he lead among men? Answer me: Was he ever lost in contemplation?

*Spirit.* And his whole life was a teaching and example for man.

*Lucifer.* No, not as far as I have learned. Sometimes he associated with sinners; sometimes, also, with the righteous; sometimes he worked, sometimes prayed, sometimes suffered. That was a varied life of his here on earth, and ye should also live like him.

*Spirit.* What you say, may be right. . . . \*

And it goes on in this way till the Seducer has completed his work with *Spirit Will and Understanding*.

The results of the seduction do not appear to us nearly so dramatic; and the final return to good is illustrated by means which have nothing whatever to do with dramatic art. Wisdom comes unexpectedly again upon the stage. The Soul also appears again, but shockingly disguised,—“more horrible to look upon than any devil.” And, further on, six youngsters in the form of devils creep out from her hideous cloak and turn in again to their lurking-places. Anima (Soul) becomes aware of her shocking transformation; *Spirit Will and Understanding* perceive that they are guilty of “Soul’s” transformation. All four quit the stage, and then “the Soul sings most pitiably in long-drawn-out tones, as people generally sing on Easter week.” Wisdom remains behind and delivers a long speech. The Soul then comes back once more with the Five-Senses walking

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\* The *Digby Mysteries*, p. 152 f., lines 398-430.

before it, Spirit and Understanding at either side and Will following. They are now all again in their first dress and in their original beauty. Spirit, Will, and Understanding express the best intentions, and at this the Soul rejoices.

The third play among the Moralities mentioned is a rather strange production ; its hero bears the name *Mankynde*. The comic parts are very prolonged and full of droll conceits and obscene jests, while the serious passages are generally very tedious. But this play shows a distinct tendency which is very important for the development of this species, viz., a tendency to individualize the action and character. The good powers are represented here only by the figure of "Grace," and the real crisis for the hero is called forth by the belief that Grace is dead. Seduction comes to him mostly in the forms of "Uselessness," "New-Fashion," or "To-day," When their first attack has failed, on the advice of "Mischief," they conjure up a devil to help them, who is to represent the Lusts of the Flesh ; this devil is no other than Tytivillus, the well-known humorous devil Tutivillus, whom we have already seen in the Woodkirk play of the *Last Judgment*.

The dramatic idea in this piece does not seem clear, nor consistently carried out ; but, in exchange, the poet has many happy thoughts. Among these may be counted the manner in which Tytivillus begins his operations against the hero. When *Mankynde* is resting himself in the evening after a hard day's work, Tytivillus steals his implement of labor, the spade.

The Moral Play of *Everybody* probably belongs to the time of Edward IV. ; the confessional interests of the Reformation period gave to it an importance far beyond its true æsthetic value, and called forth numerous adaptations and translations of it (in German, Dutch, and Latin), in which its original tendency was sometimes just reversed. The moral in *Everybody* is in sum the same as in the three preceding Moralities, and is formulated in as orthodox a manner as in any of them. The hero also is (of course) the same. But the fable has quite a different and much more original cast. We



are not here shown Human Life throughout its course, but only the close of life, the point of settling accounts, which indeed throws its light on the whole previous career. *Everybody* is summoned before the judgment-seat of God by the messenger Death. In vain he begs for delay and seeks to bribe the messenger; it is of no avail; go he must. He then looks about for a guide, a support—for someone who may plead his cause before God. He applies to Friendship, to Relationship, without success; to Riches, but these, packed up, sacked up, coffined up, as they are, cannot be taken away. Then he goes to Good Works. But Good Works lies on the ground, tied down with the chain of *Everybody's* sins. Good Works, however, refers him to her sister, Knowledge, and she leads the suppliant to Confession. As soon as *Everybody* is adorned with the jewels of Penitence, Good Works is freed and receives the use of its members. With the help of Knowledge, *Everybody* then puts on the dress of Contrition; and now, accompanied by this faithful sister-pair (Knowledge and Good Works) and also by Prudence, Strength, and Beauty, with the Five-Senses as Councillor, *Everybody* arranges his last concerns—he makes his will, receives the holy sacrament and the last unction, and then goes forth upon his way to the grave. Then, in sight of the tomb, Beauty, Strength, Prudence, and Five-Senses abandon him; Knowledge accompanies him till she sees what becomes of him; Good Works alone remains true to him till the end, and follows him into the grave.

In this subject we recognize our ancient parable of Buddhist origin, viz., *Friendship's Test in Time of Need*, the knowledge of which was brought to the Christian nations of the West by the Legend of *Barlaam and Josephat*.<sup>\*</sup> The English dramatist probably got his fable in the collection † of *Jacobus of Genoa*, and he has treated it from a specifically Church point of view, or even in a narrower clerical sense; on the occasion of *Everybody's* going to the Sacrament he makes "Five-Senses" give

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<sup>\*</sup> For this Legend see this book, chap. xi.

† Namely, the *Golden Legend*, of which we have spoken in vol. i. p. 335 f., and frequently afterwards.



an infinitely glorified dignity to the priesthood ; but yet he knew how to give clear expression to this profound subject, and that in a diction thoroughly dignified and serious, and free from the coarse jests so usual in Moral Plays.

The dramatic technicalities in the Moral Plays hitherto considered are pretty much on the same level as in the Mysteries—the same looseness of structure, the same freedom, and generally the same awkwardness in connecting the scenes. In both we notice that the chief characters generally introduce and describe themselves—which, indeed, was not so easy to avoid in the allegorical drama as in the Biblical. In the Moral Plays the intriguing, seducing powers have almost always a comic or humorous tinge, which reminds us of the way in which Pharaoh, Herod, Pilate, the Torturers, and the Devils are characterized in the Mysteries. The moral sermons take up more space in the Moralities than the dogmatic discussions do in the Mysteries, and even the Moralities are by no means wanting in dogmatics. The allegoric action does not appear so clear in many cases as the Biblical ; and the abstract figures have naturally less attraction for us than the corporeal ones. It might thus appear that little was attained by the invention of Moral Plays, or that they even represent a retrograde step when compared with the Mysteries.

But, nevertheless, they represent a decided progress. In the first place, it is a point of the greatest moment that the poet was here free to invent his story for himself, or was even obliged to invent it. The choice of subjects is, indeed, fixed and limited, for the theme is always one and the same ; but its variations are infinite. The will and power of the dramatist are shown by the way he conceives his task ; the setting of the dramatic problem devolves upon him. And to set it and solve it he must exert his ingenuity and powers of observation. In order to find his fable, he must analyze psychologically ; in order to breathe life into his characters, he must paint from life. What does it matter whether his persons are called *Luxuria* or *Avaritia* ? They look like a young voluptuous girl, or a gray-bearded man, and they

must speak and act like such. In this way the poet learns to create typical images of character, and to invent situations where they can reveal themselves, and thus to gain the interest of the spectators, to inspire them with fear, or, perhaps, more frequently to make them split their sides with laughter. A happy inconsequence of the poet has a still greater effect. In the discourses of his dramatic figures he mixes up all sorts of references to contemporary manners and a multitude of satirical touches, and to the figures themselves he gradually gives a stamp of greater individuality. Instead of abstract names, or by the side of such, types begin to appear; even in the *Castle of Constancy* we see Slander calling herself by the expressive epithet of "Back-biter." By and by concrete figures, though perhaps still typical, are introduced in increasing numbers. In the first place we see the fool, the Harlequin, with his wooden sword, associated under the name of "Vice," as a companion to the "Devil," to assist him in his business, but frequently also to wrangle with him, to mock him, to ride on his back, and to belabor him with his sword. This figure appears in the later dramas in all sorts of special functions and under a multitude of different names. Indeed, even in *Mankynde* he appears practising his nonsense under the name of "Myscheff," and perhaps, also, in the *Castle of Constancy* as "Detractio" or "Bakbyter." Besides moral types, like Hick Scornor, the frivolous Scoffer, in the course of time we see appearing also social types, like the "Tavern-keeper."

Thus the allegorical drama gradually grew up into that real living drama which draws its material from active human life. At least, it prepared the way for it, and, having once seen the light, hastened its development. This is especially true of comedy. The drama has, indeed, everywhere to create individuals of a typical character; but in tragedy the individual comes more to the front, whereas in comedy the type is made more prominent. The highest models of the comic species are represented by the habits, *i. e.*, the foolish habits, or characters of their age, in whom certain vices, failings,

weaknesses, are as it were embodied. And the greatest comic poets have never quite given over the illusion of being able to correct and reform mankind.\*

The path from the religious drama through the Allegories to the really human drama seems to be a round-about way ; but the direct way would have led into the thicket, and the progress of human culture has, indeed, ever moved by round-about paths.

In the Mysteries, not only were the subject and the idea unalterable, but the way in which the subject and idea affected each other was equally unchangeable. The power of expression was exceedingly defective. The idea in the finished work still seemed to be something strange and external—conception and execution did not correspond. It was only by a whole cycle that the subject could be exhausted, and this cycle was composed of the most heterogeneous elements, and was in fact a work of accident. The single play very seldom formed a unit or whole ; it seldom contained anything that could be called a dramatic action. The spectators were therefore interested only in the material. Only a few details made any æsthetic effect—such as character, situation, scenes ; the whole was rarely or never dramatic.

In the Moral Plays, on the other hand, the idea was everything ; without it the material was not only dead, but did not even exist. The dramatic talent was thus exercised in trying to present the idea with great vividness and individuality ; and at length the perception dawned that art, in imitating life and nature, should only represent the ideal side of matter, and should everywhere make the idea stand out clear from its subject, and more distinct than in nature or history.

The same thing took place in fact in epic poetry, and indeed in literature generally. But this process of development appears most energetic in the history of the drama, which was destined to become the highest form of artistic expression for the English national mind when filled with new life from the treasures of antiquity.

At the end of the Middle Ages it was yet far distant

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\* "Castigat mores ridendo."

from this goal. But the passion for the theatre was vigorously aroused, dramatic poetry began to work in all kinds of experiments, and even the attempts which may seem deviations from the path of progress were not without effect on the result at last attained. We have already seen, in the so-called Coventry Mysteries, how elements of the Moral Plays had been taken up in the Biblical dramas as early as the middle of the fifteenth century, if not before. A singular production of a still more mixed description, a real dramatic monstrosity, belonging to the close of this period, deserves just a few words here.

It is the play of *Mary Magdalene*—a combination of the three species—Miracle, Mystery, Morality—where the Miracle predominates. The legend of this saint entrenched upon the domain of the Gospel history, owing to her conversion, and to the fact that the Lord honored her by appearing to her after his resurrection, and therefore also upon the material of the Mysteries, and, by identifying Mary Magdalene with Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha, the connection with the Mysteries was strengthened.

The whole Magdalene legend may be divided into three sections. The first adds little to what is recorded in the Bible. The daughter of rich and respectable parents, Mary inherits at their death the Castle of Magdala—whence her name Magdalene—and gives herself up to a sinful life. Divine grace puts it into her head to go and see Christ while he was staying at the house of Simon the Leper. What follows is well known. The second section has a mythical, romantic character, and reminds us, on the one hand, of the story of *Apollonius of Tyre*, and, on the other, of *Ino Leukothea* (also a Greek myth), a goddess specially worshiped on the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea and at Massalia. Magdalene crosses the Mediterranean Sea to Marseilles, and there converts, by her power of working miracles, the heathen king and queen, who are childless, and promises them a son. The king and queen now cross, by the way Magdalene had come, to the Apostle Peter, after having entrusted their goods to the saint. During a fearful



tempest on the high seas, the queen brings forth a boy, and dies. The body of the mother and child are left upon a ledge of rock, and commended to the care of Saint Magdalene by the unhappy father. The saint, though still at Marseilles, miraculously assists the helpless couple, suckles the child, and preserves the body of the mother from corruption. The king in the meantime continues his way, is instructed and strengthened in the faith by the Apostle, and then begins his journey homeward. Calling at the rock, he finds his child alive and well, and sees his wife waked up again to life. All three now return to their protectress, Magdalene, at Marseilles. The third section is of a Christian ascetic tone, and depicts the life of the saintly penitent in the wilderness, whence she is carried by the angels into heaven, to be fed with manna and find her happy consummation.

The majority of the mediæval versions of this legend treat the first section very shortly, as being well known. But there is a number of pieces devoted solely to the second section, and, indeed, this portion was well suited for the subject of a Miracle Play. Our dramatist has, however, here worked up all the three parts in his story and has taken most pains with the first section. The motives which belong to the Mysteries are here worked out with much tenderness—such as Christ's visit to Simon the Leper and the washing of Christ's feet; Lazarus's sickness, death, and resurrection; the Easter morning; the first appearances of the risen Saviour. The Descent to Hell is also referred to—in the monologue of one of the devils. Figures like Herod and Pilate also appear, as is common in the Mysteries, but here they would certainly have been better left out: even Tiberius Cæsar is brought upon the stage, and, as the mightiest personage, he opens the piece, although not the action. The poet's art is best shown, however, when he depicts the seduction of his heroine and makes use of the characters of the Moral Plays, The kings of the World and of the Flesh appear with Satan in council, and in their suite come the Seven Deadly Sins; the Angels of Good and Evil also hover round, and sooner or later take part in the action. The Deadly Sins besiege Magdalene's castle; Lust forces his



way in, and by his flatteries and fair words succeeds in persuading Magdalene to quit her home and follow him. He takes his victim to a tavern and orders the host to produce his best. A gay cavalier named Corioste (Curiosity) soon appears and pays his addresses assiduously to Magdalene. He says the sweetest words to her, dances, eats, and drinks with her, and in a short time gains his end. "I am glad that we met," says Magdalene, "I begin to love you." "Now, my darling," he says, "will you follow my advice?—we have drunk and eaten together; shall we not now go to another place with each other?" "Whatever you wish, my treasure! If you go to the world's end I will never leave you, but rather die for you." They go aside, and the Evil Angel hurries in triumph to the three high potentates—World, Flesh, and Devil—to give them the good news, and then comes back to the girl in his keeping. The next scene shows us Magdalene in a bower, thinking about her lovers—for she has now quite a number. Waiting for one or other of them to arrive, she lies down to sleep in the fragrant bower. The Good Angel now comes near and rouses her conscience.

All these scenes show a keen perception. They breathe a certain delicate grace. The poet has well seized the abiding womanly traits in Magdalene's character, and he reveals the same knowledge of woman's nature in other passages—in her moments of compunction and after her conversion. In the further course of his story, however, chiefly in the fabulous parts of the legend, he seems anxious to have done with his massive subject. He begins to cut it shorter, and to be satisfied with the barest necessities. But, nevertheless, his drama swells out to an immense size for that age, for it did not admit of being broken up into a number of small plays.\*

In its tendency, as in its rather clumsy arrangement, the *Play of Mary Magdalene* is a thorough product of the Middle Ages. Such mixture of different species charac-

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\* It has been divided, quite arbitrarily, into two parts. Regard for the nature of the subject would have required three parts. But we see how little the poet thought of arranging his drama in this way, by the fact that in one of those favorite introductory poems of his, where he seems, as it were, to be beating about the bush, he makes the King and Queen of Marseilles appear long before the action of the first scene is finished, although their rôles belong properly to the second section.

terizes the termination of that period, and announces at the same time a more modern epoch. The varied nature of the contents, sometimes so full of adventures, the frequent change of place, the repeated voyages, the tempest, the exposing of child and mother—all these, in connection with the realistic humorous scenes and many other things which were taken up as heirlooms of the older stage by the theatre of the sixteenth century, prepare us for those romantic plays which paved the way for the dramas of Marlowe and Shakspeare; and for that class of plays which Shakspeare himself slightly touched at the beginning of his career, and with which, towards the end, he did not disdain to crown his art.

### VIII.

Thus we see how dramatic poetry, though still in hesitating, half-finished outlines, was bringing gradually to light those forms of composition on which the art of a later age was to try its vivifying, purifying power. But in the interval the most tremendous changes in science and life took place. Mediæval customs and culture died a lingering death, and the light of a new era dawned slowly upon the world.

In contemplating this process let us go back in thought to the time of Lydgate, when the first signs of the new movement began to appear. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the powerful patron of Lydgate, and the greatest Mæcenas of the age, appears as the real centre of the new influence. In him better than in any other figure of the period we see incorporated the multifarious, confused, and often contradictory influences of the century.

There was much of mystery in Duke Humphrey's life as well as in his death; his whole character, indeed, was mysterious from his first appearance on the stage of history. The slave of unbridled passions, he sometimes shows the energy of a demon in his hunting after good or evil objects. His reckless ambition and intriguing egotism thwarted the national policy during the

minority of his nephew, Henry VI., who grew up to an idiotic man from a weak and childish boyhood, hastened the downfall of the English power in France, and prepared the ground for the Wars of the Roses in England. His affable character and the firm and sturdy nature of his actions procured him the popular favor, and surrounded him with that nimbus which still clings to the "Good Duke Humphrey" in Shakspere's poetry. His interest in science and literature, and his vast munificence, won for him the love of poets and scholars. He, the youngest son of Henry IV., has the greatest resemblance to his grandfather, John of Gaunt. The good and evil qualities of "time-honored Lancaster" reappear magnified in Gloucester. It seems like the reproduction of a picture where the traits are sharpened and the whole has received a somewhat darker tone. Gloucester belonged to that class of men who are determined to drain the cup of life to its last dregs; insatiable in his pursuit of pleasure and of knowledge, and richly qualified for the enjoyment of both, he exhibited an interest and an understanding for the most divergent individualities and tendencies, had an appreciation of the beautiful and the grand, but was frequently drawn by a mysterious charm to the darker side of human nature.

His thirst for knowledge was unbounded. He studied with the closest attention the composition of his own body, worn as it was by passion and wild debauchery, and the study of nature in general led him into some of its absurd excrescences, such as astrology, alchemy, and magic. The representatives of the most diverging tendencies in literature and science are found among his most intimate acquaintances. Almost every writer of that age in England who attained to any eminence recognized Gloucester as his patron, dedicated books to him, or was spurred by him to write. His library grew from day to day and was composed of the most motley elements: such as poems by Lydgate, Commentaries on the book of Genesis, disquisitions on astronomy and medicine, scholastic philosophy and papal decrees, works on history and chronology, and the classic poets and philosophers. He cultivated the closest intimacy with the abbots of

those monasteries where manuscripts were carefully copied and received from them elegantly gotten-up codices as presents. None of the abbeys was so active in making copies in those days as that of St. Albans ; and no abbot was so warm in supporting the efforts of Gloucester, or sought and received his friendship so closely, as the abbot John Whethamestede; Whethamestede had induced Lydgate to write the legend of *Saint Alban*, and after the death of his princely patron, Gloucester, he adorned his tomb with a beautiful shrine in stone by the side of the patron Saint. Whethamestede was no ordinary man, although his literary ability fell short of his knowledge and zeal. The impulse which he gave to the study and works of others has a higher value than his own books and dissertations, which were mostly of an historical character, or mere compilations. He showed a varied interest and a decidedly good taste in more than one department of art, and he was never sparing with his money. He added numerous buildings to the abbey, adorned the walls and ceiling of St. Mary's chapel with paintings, and built an organ in the church choir, which is said to have surpassed everything of that age for its beauty and tone. But learning and everything connected with books was especially dear to his heart. Untiring in his care for the multiplication and ornamentation of valuable books, he was also careful to prepare a building worthy to receive them. In the construction of the monastery library he spared no costs ; he also established a second library for those youths belonging to his abbey who were studying at Oxford, and allotted to each of these students a yearly pension out of his own pocket. Duke Humphrey was indebted for many a book in his collection to the restless activity of Whethamestede. The warm friendship of the learned abbot for Duke Humphrey in life and in death has tended largely to produce that kindly light in which posterity regarded the dark mysterious figure of the Duke of Gloucester.

But Gloucester's memory gains a higher reputation owing to his intercourse with celebrated foreigners rather than from his connection with learned Englishmen. His highest fame depends on the fact that in those dark



days he was the great English patron of the revival of classical learning.

The seed sown by Petrarch and Boccaccio had produced an abundant crop in Italy. Great activity had been developed there, since the beginning of the fifteenth century, in the study of antiquity. The cloisters in all parts of the peninsula were ransacked for ancient manuscripts, and when the native monasteries were exhausted, foreign ones were visited, and especially those in Germany, which had become better known to Italian scholars by the Council of Constance and afterwards by that of Basel.

By the year 1430 the most important of the extant Latin classics were secured; the codices discovered abroad were either taken to Italy in the original or made accessible there in careful copies. Greek manuscripts were also brought in great numbers from Constantinople; and the following decades imported new cargoes of such as lucky finders bought or otherwise procured in Greece, Thessaly, Macedonia, Asia Minor, or on the Grecian Islands. Collections were also made of inscriptions, coins, gems, and statues, and increased attention was devoted to the remains of ancient architecture. But it was a long time before the spirit of investigation laid such powerful hold on this sort of monuments as it did on ancient literature—especially the literature of ancient Rome.

The literary treasures which had been acquired were diligently copied, often even by the hand of learned humanists, were multiplied and preserved in libraries, and above all were immediately made the subject of zealous study. The comparison of different manuscripts led to a correction of the texts; great pains were taken in the explanation of the texts; its form was used as rules in grammars and dictionaries, in rhetoric and poetry; its contents furnished philosophy and history and other branches of learning.

The study of these brilliant models had a powerful effect on the productions of the scholars themselves. Many scholars felt the need of giving a more or less systematic expression, a more or less artistic form, in



elegant Latin, to the new ideas and interests which filled their minds. An extensive correspondence and numerous compositions in prose and verse resulted from these studies,—learned works on antiquarian and geographical subjects were composed, as well as important histories and biographies, poems of occasion, erotic poems, and even obscene pieces which not rarely succeeded better than bold attempts at epics. But in all departments the language, style, and taste of these New-Latinists plainly revealed the sources they had studied. In every point of view they were emphatically dominated by the spirit of antiquity. A freer, bolder conception of the world and of life had permeated their being. Reverence for traditional authority was strongly shaken in many minds ; belief in Christianity was undermined in others ; and though some sought an anchor in the doctrine of the Stoics and other similar systems, others gave themselves up to the licentiousness of a moral skepticism and an unbridled self-indulgence. On the whole, however, the spirit of Petrarch continued to work on in its imperishable essence as well as in its excrescences, although frequently stripped of all religious sanctity.

The pleasure of assured possession cannot be compared to the joy of acquiring. We children of a more practical age can scarcely imagine to ourselves the transports of youthful enthusiasm which possessed the humanists of Italy at this time. All the thoughts and aspirations of these men were rooted and grounded in classical antiquity—in that by-gone world, full of majesty and beauty, for the return of which they longed, every item of information about which they reverently received, and which they used all their powers to recall to life. The grandeur of ancient Rome formed a living power in their souls ; and while their desires were growing into forebodings they saw their fatherland again attaining to something like its pristine glory, and believed they were announcing that brilliant future in their glowing and prophetic sentences. The national pride of the Italians rose to the highest pitch against the barbarian foreigners, the contempt of the liberal-minded investigators of Antiquity against the Middle Ages, whose yoke of bond-

age they had shaken off, against the dethroned scholasticism, and against the mendicant friars, who were pursued with merciless invectives. A natural bond, like an open, genial freemasonry, united all who sympathized with and worked for the new learning, and bound them into a great Republic of Scholars. A correspondence carried on with passionate zeal enlivened the intercourse of those similarly minded, who offered each other sweet-smelling incense in profusion, but who also sometimes combated each other with bitter contempt and measureless abuse, when the most intimate friendships had to give way to the impulses of offended vanity and excessive self-respect.

The humanists were the lions of the day, and were well aware of the fact. The learned connoisseurs of antiquity, the accomplished Latin writers, were welcomed everywhere ; without respect to their birth they associated on a footing of equality with men of the highest aristocracy and with the most elegant society. The number of those who brought understanding and active participation to their efforts was continually increasing. In different towns in Italy independent chairs were established for the study of antiquity. Centres of the new culture were formed in the republics and principalities of Italy, where a number of learned humanists assembled round some modern Mæcenas for common work and the mutual enjoyment of their acquirements. Collections and libraries were then started ; beautiful edifices, sculptures, and other works of art were produced after the spirit of antiquity. It was in those days that Florence began to blossom out under the Medicis into the glory of a modern Athens ; it was then that the court of Naples won a fairer fame than that reflected by its kingly crown ; and little dynasties, like Este at Ferrara, might boldly venture in this respect to rival with the mightiest court. Even the Roman Curia itself was affected by the breath of the new spirit. It took up the movement in all earnestness under Pope Nicholas V. (1447-1455). This pope carried out his love of splendor, especially in the domain of architecture, in an artistic sense ; he collected around him a number of learned

men, among whom were several Greeks ; he made numerous masterpieces of the Hellenic literature accessible in translations to the Latin scholars of the west, and he first gave to the Vatican Library its high scientific importance.

A great number of brilliant names appear in that early summer of the humanists. There was Gian-Francesco Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), the intellectual treasure-finder, the witty and learned expositor of what was already found, the versatile brain who, as Epistolographer, could clothe his thoughts in such easy and graceful Latin. There was the chancellor of the Florentine Republic, Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo (died 1444), who acquired a great reputation as an historian, and for his elegant style, but won in particular a world-wide fame by his translations from the Greek. There was Lorenzo della Valle (1407-1457)—better known by the name of Valla—that keen, independent, and penetrating spirit, that close observer of the rules of the ancient language, that founder of scientific grammar. There was Guarino of Verona (1370-1460), excelling all others as a teacher of *belles-lettres*, a man who had learned his Greek at the fountain head and, after his return from Byzantium, taught in several chairs in Italy until the end of 1429, when, as an old man, he repaired to Ferrara, where for thirty years longer he showed the greatest activity in his old profession. There was Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481), the most varied and productive of the New-Latin poets, and at the same time the first Latin scholar who composed Greek verses ; he was highly praised by his contemporaries for his mastery in both languages, and, in his own opinion, was the wonder of the world. Finally, there was Enea Silvio de' Piccolomini (1405-1464), who was equally accomplished in diplomacy and the service of the Muses ; in his younger years a frivolous worldling, and throughout his entire life self-satisfied and vain, but also possessed of a passionate zeal for humanism, for which he strove eagerly to procure encouragement in Germany, after he became chancellor's secretary to the Emperor Frederic III. in 1442. In Enea Silvio, who wrote verse and prose in a most tasteful and elegant

style, and who especially won laurels as an orator and historian, classical learning rose to its highest honors and to the first place in Christendom. In 1458 he ascended the papal throne as Pius II., where, indeed, he did not fulfil the high hopes of his learned colleagues, to whom he remained a rival instead of becoming a patron.

From this many-voiced concert which the enthusiastic disciples of Antiquity were conducting in Italy, many a note had already reached the British Islands, but only awoke a feeble echo there. The visit, at the beginning of the century, of the learned Manuel Chrysoloras of Byzantium, who had met with such approbation in Italy, seems to have had little effect in England, where he probably stayed in the suite of the Emperor Manuel Palæologus. What, indeed, had Hellenism to do with the English barbarians, since they had not yet even the faintest idea of the glory of Roman antiquity, such as it had dawned on the inhabitants of the classic land? It was only little by little that the threads were joined which brought England into connection with the new learning dominant in Italy. As the first herald of a company which kept growing ever larger and larger in England, appears that Thomas whom Leonardo Bruni speaks of in 1408 as "an ardent friend of our studies as far as his nation is able to comprehend them": Thomas went to Florence to buy "the books of the new poets." At this period we meet among the English prelates Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury, the zealous defender of the Lancastrians, and the no less zealous antagonist of the Lollards; he also seems to have been much interested in Latin poetry and classical studies, for Gower, when far advanced in years, sent him his *Vox Clamantis* with a flattering dedication, and the learned chancellor of Florence, Coluccio di Piero de' Salutati, also held a correspondence with him. Henry Beaufort, bishop of Winchester, a son of John of Gaunt and Catherine Swynford, took a still keener interest in *belles-lettres*, and exercised a decided influence on the mental development of his nephew, afterward Henry V. During the reign of this second king of the Lancastrian line, the bishop found opportunities of supporting the



efforts of the humanists still more strongly. At the Council of Constance (1414-1418), where Beaufort was the chief representative of the English nation, he made the acquaintance of the celebrated Poggio, one of the papal secretaries, who generally utilized their leisure at the Council in seeking out old codices, and induced him, at the close of the Council, to try his fortunes in England. Poggio, whose old patron, Pope John XXIII., had been deposed by the Council, followed the English bishop, who had been made a cardinal by Martin V., to his northern home. But if Poggio entertained very brilliant hopes from Beaufort's promises, he suffered a thorough disappointment. The English climate and English society did not at all suit the delicate Italian, and while in his new surroundings even his former zeal and success in searching up old manuscripts temporarily failed him; instead of the fat benefice which he had expected, he only received a very meagre living, and that after long waiting. He left Britain probably in the autumn of 1422, and returned home to make unceasing puns and tirades on the enormous eating and drinking of the English barbarians, and their insipid conversation. Some years later, at the beginning of the Council of Basel (1431-1448), Enea Silvio came for a short time on a diplomatic mission to England, and rummaged through the archives of St. Paul's in London for old codices, but without finding anything to attract him.

The visits of the humanists cannot have been for England altogether unfruitful. Poggio at least seems to have inspired some of the immediate friends of the Cardinal with a keen interest in the study of antiquity, and they kept up a correspondence with him long after he left England. And Piccolomini, the enthusiastic apostle of the new doctrines, soon after his return, made the acquaintance at Basel of an Englishman named Adam Mulin, to whom he communicated his own enthusiasm for the new learning. Mulin, who was afterwards Secretary of State to Henry VI. and Keeper of the Privy Seal, played a certain part in the politics of his time, and finally lost his head upon the scaffold, is considered the first Englishman who could write elegant Latin letters.



The few men of English nationality who showed any real interest in the new learning during the first half of the fifteenth century were all clergymen, or clerks, with only one exception, and that exception was Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. The figure of Duke Humphrey, therefore, stands out so much more prominently in his isolation; he showed a much better judgment for the efforts of the humanists, and a much more active assistance, than his rich and powerful rival, Cardinal Beaufort. It was a personal necessity to Gloucester to learn and understand the great masterpieces of antiquity; and as he knew how to appreciate the importance of classical studies he also knew how to value the personal renown of being a patron of the humanists, after the manner of Italian princes. He is said to have brought teachers from Italy to expound to him the Latin orators and poets. We find in his service, as ducal poet and orator, a savant from Forlì, bearing the classical name of Titus Livius, and author of a *Vita Henrici Quinti Regis Angliæ*, written on Gloucester's command, and dedicated to Henry VI. We afterwards find living at the same ducal court the young Antonio Beccaria, from Verona, a friend of Filelfo, who wrote erotic poems in excellent Latin, and also made some translations from Greek. Duke Humphrey kept up a correspondence with several well-known humanists in Italy, praised the works they sent over to him, encouraged them to new endeavors, and frequently rewarded them in a princely manner for their dedications. Leonardo Bruni, whose translation of Aristotle's *Ethics* had been favorably received by Gloucester, also sent him the first part of the *Politics*—though, indeed, he afterwards dedicated the complete work to Pope Eugenius IV. Pier Candido Decembrio dedicated his translation of Plato's *Republic* and two books of his *Letters* to the English Mæcenæ. Piero del Monte, of Venice, who had been in England as Papal agent in 1439, dedicated his *Dialogues on Moral Philosophy* to the duke; and Lapo Da Castiglionchio a number of his smaller writings, among which was a translation of Plutarch's *Artaxerxes*.

In his many-sided literary intercourse Gloucester was

not working solely for his own enjoyment and his own instruction. From the magnanimous application which he made of his collection of books, we see most plainly that he had at heart the intellectual elevation of his fellow countrymen. Here, again, he appears as the rival of Cardinal Beaufort, who enlarged and endowed the Cathedral Library at Canterbury. Here, too, as he generally did in intellectual affairs, though not always in practical politics, the duke excelled his rival. The University of Oxford began at this time to come into possession of a valuable library.\* A considerable number of codices had been already left to it by Thomas Cobham, bishop of Worcester, who died in the year 1327, though the university did not come into possession of this bequest for several years. Many others had followed Cobham's example. An ordinance of the library in 1412 gives the names of the most generous benefactors of the growing institution. Among these are found the already familiar names of Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury; Philip Repyntone, bishop of Lincoln; Edmund, Earl of March, and Richard Courtenay, chancellor of the university. At the head stand the names of Henry IV. and his four sons. By his later benefactions the youngest of these princes cast into the shade all that he himself and others had previously done for the library. The important presents which Duke Humphrey made to the university—partly in his lifetime, especially in the years 1439 and 1443-44, and partly by his will †—mark an epoch in the history of the library similar to the benefactions made by Pope Nicholas V. to the Vatican. The number of volumes the library gained by Gloucester's kindness was immense; but their number was far excelled by their contents. For these volumes contained not only works on theology, medicine, astronomy, and scholastic philosophy; classical antiquity and the Renaissance of Italy were also largely represented. Many Roman authors hitherto almost unknown to Eng-

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\* We do not speak here of the separate monasteries and colleges at Oxford; but the bequest of Richard of Bury to Durham College should not be forgotten (see above, p. 98, of the English text), for Richard determined that the library should be free (with a very few restrictions), to all members of the university.

† See Appendix.

lish scholars were here made accessible to Oxford students; the better-known writers, like Cicero, were now brought within reach in many newly discovered manuscripts. And Greek authors in Latin translations were not entirely wanting: there were many of Plutarch's biographies, a speech of Æschines, works of Plato, and Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* in versions by Leonardo Bruni. In the Oxford library we also find the names of later writers, such as Dante, and very frequently Petrarch and Boccaccio.

Gloucester's munificence spurred others afterwards to similar, though more modest, efforts; and what he did for the study of antiquity was not done in vain. The spirit of the liberal learning in England advanced very slowly, but surely. After the middle of the fifteenth century an increasing number of studious young Englishmen made their way to Italy in their thirst for knowledge. Among all the teachers of the new learning in Italy, the old Guarino of Verona drew the largest number of foreign students. The lecture-room in Ferrara where he gave his lectures was the shrine to which William Grey, Robert Flemmyng, John Free, John Gunthorpe made their pilgrimages one after another—all four men of respectability and high social standing. William Grey was of a noble family and of great wealth; he was made bishop of Ely by Pope Nicholas V. in 1454, and appointed king's councilor by Henry VI. John Free died (1465) as bishop-elect of Bath and Wells. Robert Flemmyng was elected dean of Lincoln in 1452; he was afterward apostolic Pro-Notary at Rome, and agent for Edward IV. of England; he died in his own country in 1483. John Gunthorpe occupied on two occasions the post of ambassador to the court of Castile; he became dean of Wells in 1472, and was besides president of King's Hall (College), Cambridge, and confidential adviser to Edward IV. and his queen.

Such pilgrims had brought home from Italy increased knowledge, widened views, and a refined taste. Whoever possessed the necessary means had procured rich supplies of books abroad, and these books now returned with them to England. Many, indeed, showed a great

literary activity themselves, or even wrote books. Nearly all wrote Latin poems, which contain some happy lines and passages. Some translated Greek into Latin,—especially John Free, who is, however, perhaps wrongly credited with the translation of Diodorus Siculus. Flemmyng wrote a Greek-Latin dictionary, which has unfortunately disappeared since the reign of Henry VIII. More than one of these students was distinguished for the refined and clever form of his epistles and orations.

An English peer of high rank, John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, notorious at home for his cruelty, acquired great fame at Rome as an orator under Pius II. Tiptoft's classical studies form a bright and peaceful episode in a stormy and unsettled life spent in political intrigues. These studies belong to a period of forced inactivity which the earl utilized chiefly in making a journey to Palestine and then in a prolonged stay in Italy. There he studied rhetoric and Latin very diligently, made the acquaintance of eminent authors and teachers of the liberal learning, bought many books, and played in a certain measure the rôle of a Mæcenas. At Rome, his salutatory orations delighted a humanistic pope and his cardinals with whom his king had commissioned him to treat. His evil destiny took him back to England at the close of the year 1460, where he became again entangled in politics at a most disturbed period, and was at last brought to the scaffold in 1470.

Tiptoft's fate appears to us almost typical of that rude age of the Wars of Roses, which saw the first buds of humanism in England, but destroyed so many of them and retarded the blossoming of all. What a contrast the intellectual life in England then presented to that in Italy! What a desert, what a silence, when compared with the luxuriant budding life and noisy bustle in the classical peninsula! In England there were no teachers of far-reaching fame, no renowned discoverers, no brilliant authors, no literary feuds, no great collections of art, only a few libraries worthy of mention, no Medicis, and no Neapolitan regal court. Among English scholars,



however, we do not come across that religious and moral frivolity which spread so widely in Italy in consequence of the new learning. Beneath the northern sky the new humanism grew up in silence and under rigorous discipline.

There were a few bishops and abbots who interested themselves in the classical studies and tried to promote them to the best of their ability. New Latin schools were founded, and in some old ones the study of grammar was again begun. But most important of all was the work done at the universities.

It was of vast significance that exactly at this period—gradually, indeed, and without noise—a great revolution took place in the organism of the two English universities.

The earlier glory of Oxford and Cambridge had vanished since the middle of the fourteenth century. Mediæval scholarship, like the Church on which it rested, had fallen very low from its former heights. The attempts of Wiclif and others to breathe a new life into the study of theology had been shipwrecked on the opposition of the hierarchy and the orders. Scholastic learning degenerated more and more into an empty formula in which it was benumbed and frozen. The attendance at the universities had seriously diminished. Many turned their backs upon a study that had little attraction in itself and promised only a long starvation in the future; for offices and benefices were not conferred so much for intellectual and moral attainments as for high connections and ready money. In these resident and boarding institutions a multitude of elderly gentlemen were settled who had long since ended their course of studies and obtained their university degrees, but who still waited in vain for an appointment. They thus remained as if fixed on the spot which belonged to a younger generation; for it would not have been seemly to turn them out of doors and give them over to certain misery. A large number of the undergraduates had board and lodging in the private houses at Oxford and Cambridge. Many of these students were a beggarly, rowdy, thievish lot, with whom Chaucer's Nicholas—in



the Miller's Tale—would not have cared to mix. The disorders kept up by these “chamber-deacons,” or students living in rooms, not only formed a continual annoyance, but became towards the beginning of the fifteenth century a constant danger to the public security. Robbery, murder, incendiarism, in which the students had participated, were common occurrences, and any little rebellion in the narrower home of the university gave to many a student the welcome opportunity of rustication, whereby he could interrupt the uniformity of his university life by a trip to his home. The non-English students were specially dreaded—Scots, Irish, Welsh, often rude, ragged fellows, who, even on account of their birth, could not be admitted into any of the foundations at Oxford or Cambridge, and who were driven into crime by their poverty. Frequent measures of repression, heavy punishments, sharp decrees against the conduct and the whole institution of the “chamber-deacons” had no immediate result. After a long time, however, the authorities gradually succeeded in excluding from the university the undesirable elements, and in carrying out the principle that all students should live under the regular supervision of a tutor.

This re-establishment of discipline was rendered possible by a new arrangement of the “commons” system, and the change also tended greatly to the improvement of the studies. The “Halls” or “Houses” of the old style were, for the most part, private enterprises, often established by university teachers for the benefit of their pupils or their own private purse. But they all lacked the security of landed property. By the side of these institutions, however, others of a different character had been established by the generosity of rich benefactors, viz., corporations for boarding and residence, endowed, like foundations, with landed property, incorporated into the university, but otherwise independent, favored with private rights, often with far-reaching judicial and police authority. The earliest of these new institutions, which in later times were distinguished by the technical name of “College,” reach back to the latter half of the thirteenth century; the following century saw the origin of

many colleges, but the growth of these institutions received a powerful stimulus by Wykeham's magnificent foundation of New College, Oxford.\* Wykeham's example was often copied in the fifteenth century and afterwards. The colleges kept increasing in number, in the architectural magnificence of their buildings, and in wealth and influence; whilst the old "Halls" gradually decayed, except where they were transformed into colleges or made accessories of such institutions.

In these new resident colleges the wants of the different classes of scholars were gradually satisfied—the older men found their place, as well as the poor and the wealthy students. The older men were taken, and always in increasing numbers, to fill up the ranks of the endowed "Socii" of the college, who formed the real staff and ruling powers, and were the predecessors of the present comfortable, aristocratic Fellows. On further development the degree of Master of Arts was an expressed or understood condition for the election of a Socius in nearly all the colleges where the statutes had nothing to the contrary. Exhibitions were soon founded for needy students, who had been benefited in the old colleges by the remains from the refectory table; the rich students were received in the colleges on payment of their board. Besides these students there were also priests, choir-boys, singers, sacrists, to supply the religious necessities; further, the retinue of servants for house and kitchen; finally, a connection of farmers and other dependents in town as well as in the country. What a distinguished personage the member of a college must have gradually become!—especially of a rich college, with its extensive possessions, its privileges, its far-reaching influence, its imposing edifices, its magnificent hall, its gorgeous chapel.

In the fifteenth century the life of Fellows and of students was as yet very simple (even though they lived in palaces), and very different from the luxury of their successors. It was just these stately buildings that devoured so much of the money; and, besides, the evil times and storms of an unsettled age, with the conse-

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\* See above, p. 98.

quent national impoverishment, were also severely felt by the colleges. But even the poorer institutions of this sort were preserved from indigence and beggary, and a regular, strictly prescribed mode of life turned out most advantageous to study.

Original work in the colleges was essentially the affair of the individual, not of the institution. The official instruction emanated from the university; the colleges confined themselves mainly to looking after the discipline and the studies of their members and alumni, and, perhaps, enlivening them by frequent and regular disputations. But from an early period some of the Fellows voluntarily gave private lessons to aspiring students without asking any payment, and others turned such instruction into a source of income. Thus gradually was the tutor system prepared, as well as that condition by which the centre of gravity of university life, even in the department of teaching and learning, was transferred from the university focus and public lecture-halls to the separate colleges.

The beginnings of this reform coincided with the beginnings of the humanistic movement in England. The improvement in the organization of the universities and the regeneration of knowledge went hand in hand and were completed in the closest alliance. The new field, the study of antiquity, must indeed have excited private investigation and free communication, and the formality of official university instruction was in the long run incompatible with the new development of college life. The fact is very characteristic that about the middle of the fifteenth century the Grammar Faculty finally expired at the universities after a long decline.

Indeed the founders and benefactors of many colleges had ideas more or less clearly before their minds, which nearly coincided with the direction taken by this development. In 1379, when Bishop Wykeham founded New College at Oxford, which was destined to form an epoch in the history of that university as well as of Cambridge, he had at least in mind a revival of the study of grammar, for he established at the same time in his own metropolis of Winchester that great Latin school which

was placed by its statutes in the closest connection with New College, and was intended as a preparatory school for the same. Wykeham's precedent started a tradition which was followed by many others. The archbishop of Canterbury, Henry Chicheley, who founded the proud All Souls' College at Oxford in the year 1438, had been a Fellow of New College. And it was quite in the spirit of Wykeham that William Byngham created at Cambridge about this time a sort of seminary for teachers of grammar, which he made preparatory to Clare Hall. Even the pious king, Henry VI., showed some interest in these movements, and many members of his Council still more. Several of the university colleges experienced the king's favor. With Wykeham's example before his eyes, Henry then founded the celebrated institution at Eton,\* where the magnificent building began to rise in 1441, and where the schools were able to be opened in the following year ; and almost at the same time, in 1443, he established, in close connection with the Eton School, King's College, Cambridge, which testifies to its royal origin by its palatial chambers and the architectural magnificence of its chapel. The king also provided for popular education in a wider sense, viz., by the establishing of five grammar schools in the city of London. Henry's spouse, the beautiful, talented, and imperious Margaret of Anjou, imitated his example by laying the foundation-stone at Cambridge, in 1448, of the stately Queen's College, which was afterwards completed by Elizabeth Wydville, consort of Edward IV., and known as "Queens' College." Bishop Waynflete, of Winchester, founded Magdalen College,† Oxford, in 1458 ; it was the first institution of this kind where the academic instruction was directly considered and provided for from the very foundation ; the picturesque and magnificent building of the new edifice only began to rise from the ground sixteen years later.

It almost looked as if the benevolent impulse which at an earlier epoch had been specially directed to the

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\* Under the title King's College of our Lady of Eton by Windsor.

† The beginning of the foundation, which was at first to be called Magdalen Hall, dates from some nine years earlier ; but the document formally establishing the college is dated June 12, 1458.



founding and endowing of churches and religious houses had now chosen for its favorite object the universities and what thereto belonged. And as the flower of the English Gothic style had been perpetuated in the abbeys and cathedrals, so now the Tudor style—influenced, indeed, by Italy, but yet very national—was worthily reflected in many of the new buildings which arose at Oxford and Cambridge.

And within the walls of these noble edifices was developed the flower of those liberal, humanistic studies which mark the Tudor era. The men who in the second half of the fifteenth century showed their participation and enthusiasm in the new learning had almost all a more or less intimate connection with the university colleges. Robert Flemmyng had gone forth from Lincoln College, John Free from Baliol College, Oxford. John Gunthorpe was a magister of King's College, Cambridge. The first-named bequeathed much of the book treasures he had collected to his own college; John Gunthorpe made presentations to both universities; William Grey enriched the library of Baliol College; William Sellyng was a Fellow of All Souls',—he who had wandered to Bologna to Angelo Poliziano, and had returned as a sturdy Latinist and a good Greek scholar to England in 1490, to become prior of Christ's Church, Canterbury, and afterwards ambassador under Henry VII. And from Magdalen College went forth more than one of those who gave a new impulse to the study of the classics at the beginning of the following period.

Up to the close of the century, and even later, the majority of learned men in England belonged to the clerical order. But the lay element also began to strive for higher education. It was even now becoming customary for young gentlemen to attend the university after passing through the grammar schools. Many boys of distinguished family, if not receiving their education at Eton or Winchester, were brought up, instead, as cloister-boarders by learned abbots; others were trained under the eyes of humanistic-minded bishops as pupils of their house school, or as household pages.



## IX.

## NATIVE PROSE.

Even the national literature could not in the long run escape the influence of the new learning ; but there was at first little connection between the two. The few who penetrated deeper into the study of antiquity, as a rule cared very little for the cultivation of the mother tongue ; while those who wrote English were generally outside the humanistic movement. Even a poet like Lydgate, who was acquainted with the Latin writings of Petrarch and Boccaccio, did not know how to utilize them for the improvement of his own style, except by borrowing a few learned expressions and mythological allusions.

As it was with poetry, so it was with prose ; and to this we must now turn our attention. It was only towards the end of the period of which we are speaking that the first few evident traces of the humanistic influence appear in English prose. To the men of the earlier generation classical antiquity remained a book with seven seals.

During the first half of the fifteenth century religious and theological matters still formed the principal subjects for prose composition ; and prose was now further cultivated in close connection with the tendencies of the previous period. The orthodox homily and the edifying tract still felt the prevailing influence of Hampole ; the heterodox homily and the controversial pamphlet followed the model of Wiclif. Neither Hampole nor Wiclif escaped the fate of having his literary personality magnified into mythical proportions. Numerous writings of their imitators, and, indeed, works of their contemporaries, and even of their predecessors, were ascribed to both. But while those proceeding from the Hampole point of view were treated with official toleration and encouragement, Wiclifism was exposed to merciless persecution. And yet it was Wiclif who had given the first powerful impulse to the revival of English prose. If the movement introduced by him had been guided by judicious connivance and prudent supervision into regulated

channels, who can say to what a height the prose literature would have attained, even in the fifteenth century, under the combined influence of the religious and humanistic ideas?

But Wiclifism was violently suppressed; and, though it could not be altogether stifled, its operations were confined within the narrowest limits, where it then continued its existence with so much the greater purity, although with small results. That spirit of harsh intolerance and bloody orthodoxy which marks the reign of the Lancastrians did injury to the intellectual life of England in every department and in all forms of expression; but the national prose felt the injury most deeply.

That this spirit became dominant was not the fault of anybody in particular; it emanated, by a sort of necessity, from the circumstances of the times. The mediæval order of things in Church and society felt its foundations threatened, and fought with spasmodic energy in desperate self-defense for its very existence. As an uncomfortable coldness precedes the rising of the sun, so in all the dark periods of the Middle Ages there was scarcely ever so uncomfortable an atmosphere as in this century, when the Middle Ages ended. The means for the enjoyment of life were, indeed, much more abundant than before; but to a candid mind the difficulty of an unalloyed delight in existence was greatly aggravated. A certain languor, a lack of perfect confidence and of happy, trusting cheerfulness, had come over many minds. Many of the old ideals had proved hollow; but there was not the courage to admit the fact; with fear and trembling people clung to them so much the more tenaciously. Much in the existing condition of affairs was felt to be intolerable, but even the best minds began to despair of the possibility of improvement.

How did it stand with the Church? The protector of the faith, the dispenser of the highest goods, lay prostrate, wounded to death by schism and corruption. Three great councils tried in succession to restore the unity of faith, and to reform the Church in head and members; but the results corresponded little to the vast

expectations with which these Church councils had been welcomed. At Pisa nothing was done ; at Constance the schism was put aside without even beginning the necessary reform ; at Basel an earnest attempt at reform was made, especially of the head, and the result was, that the unity of the Church was anew endangered. Everything soon turned into the old groove, and the impious career went down the inclined plane more quickly than before.

The brief rise of the aristocratic element in the hierarchy tended to strengthen the monarchy that the Church upheld, but this, sinking always deeper into the slough of frivolity and moral corruption, gave the death-blow to all respect either for itself or the Church.

In the meantime the spirit of sectarianism arose in every quarter, and threatened the unity of faith at its roots. The seed had been conveyed from England to Bohemia, and the Hussites first became really formidable after the death of their chief. The religious wars consorted with the numerous other evils that were rending Christendom. Everywhere disunion and bloody conflict. Here states are warring, there the masses combine and raise the flag of civil discord, in a third place lurks conspiracy, Ancestral kings lose crown and life ; new dynasties are founded, bloody battles fought ; enormous changes of fate and fortune are brought about in wondrous ways. The spirit of chivalry degenerates, the knighthood loses the control of society in war and peace. Everywhere a chaotic struggle, a formless fermentation of new forces. In such times shameless deceivers arise, as well as enthusiastic prophets, and mysterious powers seem to gain the ascendancy over the human mind. The world appears to the minds of many a confused and hopeless riddle. Fortune, blindly rolling her ball, flits before the mental eye, raising up princes and kingdoms and casting them soon in the dust. The grinning skeleton of the Scythe man, Death, is seen following closely in the train of war and pestilence, compelling old and young, high and low, to join his dance, or forcing them into his barge. The farcical is easily associated with the horrible. Everywhere in the suite of

the kings we perceive the buffoon, as the living consciousness and incarnate reflection of the time, and the long car of the carnival becomes the "Ship of Fools." In the management of the world's affairs nothing can be recognized but the rule of pure unreason, or, even worse than that, the rule of the wicked one.

The devil now plays a greater rôle than almost ever before. Magic and necromancy gain many adepts ; the masses begin to scent sorcerers and witches everywhere. In times like these only that man is to be considered happy who finds his stay and consolation in art and science, or whose simple mind continues quietly to work and rest in his own narrow sphere, as his fathers did before him. These are the times when heretics, prophets, and witches are burned alive ; when John Huss and Joan of Arc are bound to the stake ; when Sir John Oldcastle dies a martyr's death ; and when Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, must do penance in the streets and churches of London, before the eyes of the citizens, for sorcery and high treason.

The bloody persecution of the Lollards began under Henry IV. became more intense under his celebrated successor, and continued under Henry VI., after a short pause, till near the middle of the century. The proceedings of the first Lancastrian were guided by cool, calculating statecraft, which bade him unite the interests of his dynasty with the interests of the prelates. Politics and misguided religious fervor worked together in Henry V., in whose character heroism and fanaticism, humanity and recklessness, were so strangely mixed. The pious and unhappy "mock-king," Henry VI., who followed him on the throne, seems scarcely capable of bearing the responsibility of his actions or his failings.

The blow that fell upon the Wiclif party in the tragic fate of their main support, Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, was particularly heavy. The Lollards, indeed, were never completely suppressed ; they continued their activity in secret. But in the meantime the healthy growth and fruitful realization of Wiclif's ideas had been stopped, and the sharp measures taken against copiers, distributors, or preservers of writings in any way

tainted with heresy, attained their object, for the most part, if not altogether; they checked, in fact, the unauthorized translating from Latin, and the handling of difficult subjects in the vernacular, to the great detriment of English literature.

The apologists of orthodoxy generally employed the Latin language, which had been used also by Wiclif in his doctrinal works. Among these apologists the first place belongs to a provincial of the Carmelite order, viz., Thomas Netter, of Saffron-Walden, in Essex, a confessor and private secretary to Henry V., whose infant son he accompanied to his coronation in France, where he died at Rouen, November 3, 1431. Church history is, in all probability, indebted to this Netter for the compilation of that *Bundel of Weeds*, first published in our day, which throws much light, though purposely discolored, upon the history of Wiclifism. His chief work, *Compendium of the Antiquities of the Catholic Faith*,\* written with much learning and acumen, had a marked influence on the theological controversy when at its height; it appeared in three volumes, of which the first was dedicated to Pope Martin V., and the second to King Henry V. This comprehensive work went through no fewer than three editions in the sixteenth century, and became a storehouse for the defenders of the Romish faith against the Reformation, and from it even a Bellarmin was not ashamed to borrow weapons.

Soon after the death of this Thomas Waldensis, another very important but most peculiar champion of the hierarchy entered the lists. Among the opponents of Wiclifism, Reginald Pecock is the most interesting, and at the same time the only one who, with a zeal and success equal to Wiclif's, cultivated the national prose. Pecock was the most distinguished writer of polished English in his day, and as a theologian was quite as acute and learned as Thomas Netter; he was a *protégé* of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, by whom he was appointed to the bishopric of St. Asaph in 1444. A Welsh-

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\* *Doctrinale Antiquitatum fidei ecclesiæ Catholicæ*, published for the first time in the years 1521-32, at Paris; afterwards at Salamanca (vols. ii. and iii.), 1566; then again (complete) at Venice in 1571.



man by birth, clever as a dialectician, and original in his ideas, Pecock considered it his duty to devote his talents to the service of orthodoxy. From his pen flowed a series of didactic, apologetic, and polemical writings, some in Latin, but most in English, in which strict logical reasoning is combined with polished, popular diction.

He wished especially to work upon the masses, who, in his eyes, were most exposed to the seductions of the Lollards : to bring them to the true spirit of the orthodox religion as he understood it ; to show them the reasonableness of the Church doctrines and rites ; and to expose the groundlessness of the attacks of his opponents. With this intention, about 1440, he wrote his *Donet*, an introduction to the most important truths of the Christian faith, in the form of a dialogue between a father and son. Several years later he issued, in a similar dress, a continuation of this work, *The Folewer to the Donet*, which is addressed to a more educated class of readers.

Pecock had a very strong *esprit de corps* and a great idea of order ; and he was sorely vexed by the constant attacks to which the lives of the higher clergy were then exposed for their doings and neglects. To repel these attacks was the one desire of his heart ; and so in 1447, in a sermon delivered at St. Paul's Cross in London, he defended those bishops who were unable to find time to preach after attending to their pastoral duties, and also those who for good reasons did not reside in their dioceses ; and he even justified the papal provisions and annates—the very things which Parliament and people had supported Wiclif in attacking. Pecock's sermon created an immense sensation, and sharpened the existing antagonism instead of quieting it. The sermon roused up against the eloquent apologist himself a whole crowd of new opponents—not only in the ranks of the Lollards and the great masses, but also among the orthodox and the learned—in the universities and among the medicant orders. For the present, the favor of the court and the good wishes of his episcopal colleagues supported the bishop of St. Asaph ; but the time was coming when the hierarchy itself was destined to be horrified by its peculiar defender.

With undiminished zeal Pecock followed up his rôle of an *enfant terrible* of orthodoxy. For some years he had been preparing a book—*The Repressor of Overmuch Blaming of the Clergy*—which was to justify thoroughly, on the ground of principle, the attacked institutions of the Church. With the elaboration of this extensive work he was closely occupied about the year 1449. In it he intended to refute completely eleven objections of the Lollards; he confined himself, however, really to six, which referred to the use of images, pilgrimages, tenure of land by the clergy, papacy and episcopacy, canonical law, and religious orders. These points are treated in four parts. At the beginning is an introductory portion, examining the common basis of these objections, and combating the errors from which they proceed. He says these errors are threefold, viz.: (1) That only is divine law which is founded on the Holy Scriptures; (2) The true meaning of the Scriptures is revealed to the willing mind of every faithful, humble Christian; (3) All human arguments which contradict the sense, thus recognized, of the holy records, are to be rejected.

For some six years the *Repressor* remained uncompleted. When it appeared, the five undiscussed objections were compressed together in the last chapter of the fifth book, with references to other writings of the apologist, where their refutation might be found.

The *Repressor* is one of the most valuable monuments of English theology, and one of the most important productions of English prose bequeathed to us by the fifteenth century. The method pursued by Pecock, of first letting his opponents thoroughly explain their own motives, and then driving them triumphantly from the field by their own arguments, affords us a most instructive glance into the religious views of those times. The rich intellectual resources, the logical energy, and the dialectic subtlety of the author, will be admitted even by those who take most offense at the sophistical application to which these talents are occasionally put. And although Pecock knew no Greek, and was even deceived as to the authorship of many of the works going under false names, we must nevertheless concede to him

an amount of learning by no means despicable in that age, and, what is more, a clearness and boldness of critical perception far in advance of his times.

He recognized the unhistoric character of the gift of Constantine, believed that the Apostles' Creed was not written by the Apostles themselves, and was even free to consider the Book of Wisdom as apochryphal. Pecock's rationalism is specially remarkable. He combated the narrow Bible-worship of the Wiclifites, not by a reference to the authority of church tradition, but by appealing to reason. He goes so far as to say :

"Whenever and wherever any rule of the natural moral law is written in the Holy Scriptures or elsewhere, it is also found written down in the book of the human soul more truly than on parchment or vellum. And when any apparent contradiction exists between the words of the outer book of the Holy Scriptures and the judgment of reason engraven in the heart and soul of man, then the external, written words must be interpreted and explained in conformity with the judgment of reason on the same point ; but the judgment of reason must not be explained, glossed, or interpreted until it has been brought into conformity with that outer writing, in the Bible or elsewhere." And in another place he asserts that faith in the Sacraments would find greater support on the grounds of reason than in the testimony of the Holy Scriptures.

It is conceivable that orthodoxy was but little edified by a defender of this sort. By his *Book of Faith*, Pecock made the business still worse. Proceeding with the laudable desire of bringing the Lollards into submission to the hierarchy, he gives up, in point of fact, the infallibility of the visible church, and recognizes in the Bible the only rule of supernatural and revealed truths.

The cup was now full and soon began to overflow. His old patron, the Duke of Gloucester, had died a few years previously. And the new protectors, who had stood up for him on Humphrey's death and elevated him to the bishopric of Chichester, did not dare to help him any longer. One of them, William Delapole, Duke of Suffolk, when on his way into exile, had met his death

by a murderer's hand. Another, Walter Hart, bishop of Norwich and confessor to the queen, had been expelled from his diocese. Pecock had no more friends on whom he could rely. Little by little he had succeeded in making himself hated by all parties : by the Lollards and the orthodox ; by the mendicant friars, whose method of preaching he had often bitterly attacked ; by the masses, because he had defended the prelacy and the annates and had been himself the *protégé* of Suffolk and Norwich ; by the aristocracy, who feared some of his radical theories ; by the bishops, who had at last come to the conclusion that this physician was at least as dangerous as the evils of Wiclifism which he sought to cure. Even the favor of the pious but timorous king had been completely lost by this reckless champion of reason.

The storm which had been brewing over Pecock's head broke out in October, 1457. The bishop of Chichester was excluded from the royal council, and was compelled to answer before the primate of the English church and the commissions appointed by him ; while at the same time an Augustine monk, named John Bury, violently attacked his *Repressor* in a Latin pamphlet, *The Sword of Solomon*. Pecock was at last given the choice of recanting or of being burned.

The valiant prelate had gradually grown tractable ; the martyr's fate had no attractions for him ; his senses had become confused ; the world seemed to him upside down, and he even failed to see his own position clearly. He consented to a recantation, which took place first in the presence of the primate and a number of theologians, and afterwards before the whole people. On the second Sunday in Advent, December 4, 1457, Pecock appeared in full episcopal robes at St. Paul's Cross in London, where twenty thousand people were waiting for the unusual spectacle. The penitent, accompanied by the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishops of London, Rochester, and Durham, and several clergymen of minor rank, fell upon his knees and made a public and devout confession of his guilt. Among the errors which he admitted and abjured were propositions which he never



had asserted, and others of whose truth he must have been just as convinced then as ever before. When Pecock had finished, a fire was lighted. With his own hand he was obliged to deliver over the children of his brain—his books—to the hangman, who cast them into the flames. The people were with difficulty restrained from burning him along with his books.

Pecock's recantation was read officially in every diocese. Everywhere his enemies exulted and overwhelmed the vanquished adversary with contempt. His writings were everywhere sought out to be burnt. The University of Oxford, where liberal tendencies had from time to time always kept cropping up, was completely cowed, and gave a brilliant illustration of its orthodoxy. King Henry VI., in founding King's College, Cambridge, took care to insert a proviso in the statutes that every scholar should declare on oath never during life to countenance the errors of Pecock or of Wiclif.

In the meantime the repentant sinner was made to feel that he was little trusted, notwithstanding his recantation. Pecock was held in custody by the primate, first at Canterbury, and then at Maidstone. He appealed to the pope, who requested the archbishop to reinstate the bishop of Chichester in his dignities. But, with the help of the king, the execution of the papal bull was frustrated. It would appear that Pecock was intimidated, and induced to renounce his bishopric.

Broken in spirit, deprived of his dignities and freedom, tarnished in his honor, he was relegated to Thorney Abbey, in Cambridgeshire. Complete separation from the world and men, tolerable bodily comforts, an intellect starved to death by being far removed from all mental excitement, forbidden to see books or put pen to paper,—such was the fate that awaited Pecock here. When the doors of Thorney Abbey closed behind him, he was practically buried alive, and disappeared from the sight of men. Of his later life and of his death, not the faintest trace remains.

Thus it happened to the enthusiastic partisan of the Papacy, the defender of the prelates, the learned and, in his opinions, moderate theologian, because he had



placed too great confidence in the power of reason, and had been bold enough to instruct the people on intricate religious matters in their own language.

Those who were more prudent wrote of such things in Latin, and treated only simple subjects in English. There were still sufficient fields of literature, whether for edification, instruction, or entertainment, in which writers might disport themselves without much danger. What was produced in this undangerous literature was indeed, as a rule, of very little consequence to the progress of knowledge or the development of prose. But in a sense it always helped to spread a certain kind of education among wider circles, and to accustom authors and readers to the prose style.

Prose had early gained the right of citizenship in the domain of the Legends. Even at the beginning of the fifteenth century—presumably in the reign of Richard II.—the story of the *Epiphany*, or *Three Wise Men*, at whose shrine in Cologne Edward III. had made a splendid offering in 1338, had been told in English prose. Different circumstances combined to create an interest in this story and to cause its spread in England at that time. The multitudes desired to learn more about those well-known, but yet so mysterious, heroes of the Gospels and the religious drama. It was a pleasure to many to see in legend old beloved figures of church tradition, like the empress Helena, reappearing in a new connection but in the old manner. Finally, for a generation that still nursed the thought of the Crusades, and in imagination liked to roam in lands beyond the sea, it must have been a pleasant charm to find collected in this tale a whole store of information about places in the Holy Land which had been consecrated by the Saviour's presence, and which had been distinguished afterwards by holy shrines and churches.



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